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Ex-votos Religious and Social Commentaries in Northeast Brazil

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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Carolyn Lindsey King entitled "*Ex-votos* Religious and Social Commentaries in Northeast Brazil." I have examined the final electronic copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in Anthropology.

Faye V. Harrison, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation and recommend its acceptance:

Rosiland J. Hackett, Benita Howell, Steve Young

Accepted for the Council:
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Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)

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EX-VOTOS: RELIGIOUS AND SOCIAL COMMENTARIES IN NORTHEAST BRAZIL

A Dissertation
Presented for the
Doctor of Philosophy
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Carolyn Lindsey King
May 1999

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated my mother

Carolyn Cowan King

and to the memory of my father

James Robert King

who have given me invaluable opportunities

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Abstract

The religious tradition of offering anatomical votive images out of wood or clay has long been practiced in the impoverished state of Ceará, Brazil and is still a vital tradition at the Sanctuary of St. Francis of Wounds in Canindé. This study documents the *ex-voto* ritual, examining the carvings as works of art embodying the prayers of the subaltern, subordinated within interlocking hierarchies of class, race, ethnicity, and gender; and discerns what this popular ritual practice encodes about its relationship with the Roman Catholic Church. It also examines, from the perspective of the Northeast's impoverished people, what the offered anatomical artifacts reveal about the social body.

This is a multivocal tradition elucidating encoded values and meanings which relate to research involving folk aspects of religious belief systems, ethnomedical strategies, and cultural domination and resistance. This research probes issues of art and material culture, often overlooked in ethnography, as central components of holistic inquiry. As such, the *ex-voto* tradition is discovered to provide functions of reciprocity and solidarity and can be seen as emblematic of the culture of its practitioners.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION and PROJECT SUMMARY

I went to the field to document a tradition of religious folk art. However, once I was in the field for a while, I realized that what I was documenting was not art *per se*, but beliefs and practices. What I present to you is a documentary study of healing, hope, and beliefs, what the people I spoke with called *fé*, faith; yet it is not totally a study of the intangible. Through the use of words and art, people shared their miraculous experiences with me. I will try to share them with you. For almost six months I listened to people's stories of miracles that St. Francis of Wounds had worked on their behalf and examined the way they replicated these miracles in wood and clay, on paper, or one of the many other ways they felt compelled to create. Everyday as I sat in the *Casa dos Milagres*, the House of Miracles, I was awed by the magnitude of human suffering, the resilience of the human spirit, and the restorative powers of human faith. I could not help but be affected. It was a healing experience that deepened my faith and confirmed my hopes, but that is my story. I am here to tell you theirs. What I report to you are the stories of the *romeros*, the pilgrims. I have tried to place no personal judgment upon them. I have no intention or desire to refute them with scientific or medical theories. To do so would dishonor the people who shared their miracles with me.

A. Northeast Brazil

Located about one hundred kilometers inland from Fortaleza, the coastal capital of the northeastern state of Ceará, the small Roman Catholic shrine town of Canindé is situated in the harsh and infertile backlands of the *sertão*. Cycles of drought have

historically plagued the small farmers who populate this remote rural area. Due to a paucity of water, subsistence agriculture can barely be maintained. Roughly seventy-five percent of the *sertão* population suffers from malnutrition and related diseases, and fifty-two percent of the infant mortality in Brazil occurs in this region of the Northeast (Nations and Rebhun 1988). Having been compared to the Australian outback, this region encompasses the largest area of poverty in South America, making it a political embarrassment often ignored by national and even state legislation. Perceived as an impediment to progress, northeast Brazil has been left to fend for itself as best it can. The result has been widespread migration to industrial centers in the South, instances of lawlessness overlooked by federal and state authorities, and the continuation of a cycle of poverty and dependency for the subaltern of this region (Pang 1989; Robock 1963, 1975).

Reasons as to why this cycle of poverty is allowed to continue are directly related to an unchecked distribution of power between the elites and the masses. This struggle, where ten percent of the population controls roughly eighty percent of the resources is the issue. From the time of Portugal's colonization of Brazil in the 1500's, a bimodal population has been perpetuated. Since Brazil was settled mainly as an agricultural resource, itself a commodity, all its resources, human and otherwise, have been viewed as fodder for capitalist ventures. There exists a population of those who "have," and a subservient population that helps them attain and maintain that position. After the population of Amerindians proved to be inadequate as a service population, the enslavement of Africans, already an institution in Portugal, was substituted. Slavery in Brazil was particular in that new generations of Africans were continually brought into the country. Rather than encourage a domestic population of slave generations, new generations were imported. The philosophy behind this principle can be summed up in a chilling statement from Wagley (1963: 20) that states, " . . . it was cheaper to import a slave than raise one." As a result there was simultaneously a burgeoning population of

both freed and enslaved Afro-Brazilians that was much larger than the European landowners. The imbalance of the population continues, still following the colonial template of lighter skinned people with European ancestry benefiting from a majority of resources and the masses of darker skinned making do with the rest.

Large landholdings have historically been exploited for monetary gain in an international market rather than for local profit. A small system of farms developed around this vast export-centered agriculture to supply the necessary produce for local subsistence. Gradually larger amounts of land have been used for international monocropping agribusinesses leaving little to no land for domestic supply. This imbalance in the system of land tenure in Brazil has left many small farmers without land to farm, and it is the technical advances of agribusiness that have left them without jobs. In this part of the Northeast, many of the large landholdings, *fazendas*, are owned by absentee landowners, and for the most part are underutilized as cattle ranches or left uncultivated for future speculation. These absentee owners control the regional political and economic powers. Such control results in under-representation and neglect of the impoverished majority by state and national offices, and leaves most of the residents of the *sertão* dependent upon a series of interpersonal relationships which maximize security and minimize risks in human survival. These relationships cross and unite all strata of class, race, and gender, and create linkages which can be categorized as either horizontal or vertical. The horizontal relationships are found among peers and provide exchanges in foodstuffs, cooperative labor, and social interaction. The others, and the ones most relevant to this study, are those relationships that are vertical, traversing the social class system. In the Northeast there are two examples of these vertical institutions to which people turn for relief and assistance: the "informal" institution of patron/client relationships, and the "formal" institution of the Roman Catholic Church.

Patronage as delineated by George Foster in his discussion of "dyadic contracts" is manifested in all facets of Brazilian life (Foster 1961a, 1963, 1965). Patronage theory, which explicates the one-to-one reciprocal socioeconomic relationship between patron and peasant in this agrarian portion of Brazil, has been applied to the presence of the Roman Catholic Church in northeast Brazil and particularly to the tradition of *ex-votos*. This religious tradition is based upon a reciprocal spiritual contract that is made between a supplicant (client) and his or her favorite saint (patron) and functions much like the secular contracts between patron and client. In this ritual, the supplicant promises to repay the saint after the saint has granted or fulfilled the supplicant's request.

Well over ninety percent of the Brazilian population consider themselves to be Catholic (de Kadt 1967). However, Brazilian anthropologist Thales de Azevedo stated that Brazilian Catholicism "is relatively independent of the formal Church" (Bruneau 1982: 28). Seeds for this independence were sown during colonization when the presence of a priest in the *sertão* was infrequent and was usually only to attend to the needs of members of the landed society. A Mass might be given in a plantation chapel upon occasion which farm workers were required to attend, but religious teachings never filtered down to the farmworkers. Consequently, an anticlerical philosophy on the part of the farmworkers resulted, which brings about many interesting issues of religious politics in Brazil (de Kadt 1967; Forman 1975; Freyre 1945, 1986; Hutchinson 1957; Wagley 1963). For example, home altars rather than a formal church setting became the locus of religious practices. Amplifying this anticlerical atmosphere is the fact that the religion was also shaped by the creolization of beliefs and rituals of enslaved workers brought from West Africa and indigenous Native Americans, such as the Tupi-Guarani and the Cairiri. The resulting heterodox folk Catholicism not only shares some of the same beliefs as other popular Afro-Brazilian religions, such as *Candomblé* and *Umbanda*, it is often practiced in

conjunction with them. For this reason my research situates the *ex-voto* tradition within this religious pluralism.

Before proceeding further into the text, I will explain the reasoning for my choice of religious terminology, particularly the use of the terms "folk" and "orthodox." The labeling of the religious practice of a people is hard to accomplish under any terms, but in Latin America, and especially in Brazil, this difficulty is compounded. In Brazil one finds conservative Roman Catholic practice which mirrors the ideals upheld before the changes brought by the Second Vatican Council (Vatican II). One can also find more mainstream or popular versions of practice with a more informal Mass and congregations comprising organizations such as "CEBs," the acronym for *communidad(e) eclesial de base* (ecclesial base communities). These are "[C]atholic organizations in which clergy and pastoral agents are engaged, in one way or another, in efforts to raise political and social awareness" (Burdick 1993: 2-3) and are the result of the spread of liberation theology throughout Brazil. Much has been written about liberation theology in Latin America, and its success or failure seems to vary with each writer (Bruneau 1982; Drogus 1997; Fragoso 1987; Löwy 1996; Mainwaring 1986; Nagle 1997; Puleo 1994; Sathler and Nascimento 1997). Terminology used by these authors to describe Brazilian Catholic religion are: "orthodox" or "institutional" for the hierarchical Church of Rome, and "folk," "popular," "mainstream," "progressive," "grass-roots," "radical," and "church of the poor," to describe the church of the people. In many instances these terms can be and are used interchangeably.

Canindé does not fit into any of the more urban research models described in the works of the aforementioned authors. It is a rural town with a population that ebbs and flows, and its only *raison d'être* is the shrine. The Franciscans who administer the shrine are definitely adherents of liberation theology, but their views are manifested in an individualistic way rather than as one of the Order. Mass can be more or less informal

depending on who is saying it on a particular occasion. The welfare of the impoverished people to whom they minister is also served according to the skills and abilities of the individual priests. For example, one *frei* runs a radio station which broadcasts religious and secular programming, another *frei* teaches vocational training, while another travels to remote communities to conduct Mass and to hear confessions. From this description, the religious practice in Canindé should fall under the category of the Popular Church. Additionally, tenets of Popular Catholicism avoid the control of the institutional Church and support the belief in a direct and personal relationship with the sacred (Bruneau 1982). This belief is shared by the pilgrims who come to the shrine. However, the *ex-voto* tradition, the focus of this study, falls completely outside the dogma of the Church, be that orthodox or popular. The *ex-voto* tradition, the entering into a contract with a saint and fulfilling the contract with an offering that mirrors the complaint, is a tradition of the people, not of the Church. It is passed down through oral tradition and the *milagres*, the mimetic votive offerings, themselves are labeled folk art (Egan 1991; Oettinger 1990, 1992, 1997). Furthermore, Slater (1986, 1990), Forman (1975), and della Cava (1970, 1972), are three anthropologists who have researched this type of religion in Ceará, and use the term "folk." For these reasons, in this research when I use the term the Church, it is to refer to the institutional Catholic Church of the priests. The *ex-voto* practice is, however, a folk tradition and the practitioners of this tradition, for the most part, have a type of belief that does not fit into any of the aforementioned categories. For this reason, I will call it folk Catholicism. Having received my primary training as a folklorist, this label has no negative connotation for me. The term merely means outside the mainstream of the dominant praxis, passed down through oral tradition, based more on emotion than on intellectualization, and having its own set of shared knowledge and language.

B. The ex-voto tradition

The anticlerical philosophy of Brazilian folk Catholicism is demonstrated in the *ex-voto* practice at shrine sites such as Canindé where the contract is between the pilgrim and St. Francis, and a priest's intercession is precluded.

Since the mid-1700's when the mission was created by a German order of Franciscan mendicants who left a monastery in Recifé, pilgrims have journeyed to the Sanctuary of St. Francis of Wounds (*Santuário de Saõ Francisco das Chagas*) in Canindé. The mission, dedicated to St. Francis, was built at this location because of a donation of land, not because of divine instruction such as that which has led to the construction of many Roman Catholic shrines such as the shrine to the Virgin of Guadelupe outside Mexico City. However, due to the already existing cycle of poverty in this region which had created a climate rich in nativism and charismatic beliefs, this mission was soon transformed into a pilgrimage site for the marginalized farmers of the region. St. Francis has always been associated in Roman Catholic canonical literature with thaumaturgy, the performance of miracles. Because religious beliefs of the *sertajaneos* focus on survival in this lifetime rather than on life after death, it is logical that they would be drawn to a saint who they are told works miracles. Also, the fact that St. Francis received the stigmata and is often depicted bleeding from the hands and feet, something with which agricultural workers could strongly identify, made him readily embraced. Soon individuals and groups of people would converge upon the mission to pay homage to St. Francis.

Roman Catholic pilgrimage existed for centuries in Europe before Brazilian colonization. In fact, the Brazilian term for pilgrimage, *romaria*, is derived from the Latin word meaning traveling to Rome. There is also evidence that many indigenous tribes traveled to sacred areas for spiritual purposes. One group in particular was the Tupi-Guarani who roamed throughout central Brazil guided by divine direction, looking for "a land without evil" (Lanternari 1963; Ribeiro 1992; Shapiro 1987). It seems quite likely

that because of the pre-existing pilgrimage traditions combined with clerical encouragement the transition from a backwater mission to an important shrine site was a relatively short one.

In Canindé, most pilgrims travel to fulfill their part of a promise, a spiritual contract, to St. Francis for interceding on their behalf in some remedial fashion. The pilgrims say that they have come to pay the promise, "*pagar a promessa.*" This payment is usually met by the offering of a votive, an *ex-voto* called a *milagre*. *Ex-voto*, a generic term used in academics, is Latin and means "from a vow." It is used to describe a votive offering given in exchange for something that has been accomplished. The term *milagre* is used by practitioners of this tradition and is Portuguese for miracle. The *ex-voto* tradition has roots in pre-Christian beliefs and can be traced through the archaeological record to civilizations pre-dating that of the Greeks and Romans (Cassar 1964; Davidson 1998; Deyts 1988; Jackson 1988; Lanciani 1967; Rouse 1902; Sambon 1895). This pagan tradition was syncretized into early Christian practices and with the movement of the Roman Empire spread throughout Europe where it is still practiced in many rural areas (Cátedra 1988; Dubisch 1995; Finucane 1977; Garbini 1966; Hanson 1968; Marinatos and Hirmer 1960; Merrifield 1987; Nolan 1991;Oettinger 1997; Pina-Cabral 1986; Radford 1949; Wilson 1983). Spanish and Portuguese explorers brought the tradition to the New World where it blended with compatible indigenous practices and is today a vital part of folk Catholicism ranging from the North American Southwest to the southern tip of South America (Barreto personal papers; Bercht 1989; Cardoso 1983; della Cava 1990; Dörner 1962; Egan 1991; Forman 1975; Frota 1989; Gross 1971; Medeiros 1987; Meirelles 1968; Mota 1968; Oettinger 1990, 1992; Oktavec 1995; Romano 1965; Sanchis 1983; Saia 1944; Slater 1986, 1990; Toor 1947; Turner 1978).

There are several methods pilgrims use to pay this promise. One writer categorizes them as animate, inanimate, exuvial, and replicative (Finucane 1977). These categories

will be covered in detail in Chapter 5, but for clarification I will give a brief description of each.

The replicative *milagres* are by far the most common and are the main focus of this research. These typically depict affliction of the human body but occasionally illustrate other subjects such as animals, houses, or occupational equipment. Most often they are carved from wood, but they are also fashioned from clay, paper, cloth, wax, styrofoam, or other materials (Figure 1*). Each *ex-voto* is a one-of-a-kind artifact created by the pilgrim or commissioned from a neighbor or relative. The range of artistic ability is vast, but each *milagre* is a tangible symbol of physical or psychological pain. I look at each as a work of art and a symbol of faith.

Animate votive offerings most often are displayed through physical actions of the pilgrim such as walking a great distance to reach the shrine or creating a situation which causes mortification of the flesh such as traversing the concrete steps to the shrine on one's knees. Less commonly found are animate offerings of sacrificial animals.

Inanimate offerings range from lighting candles to monetary tithes, while exuvial offerings are basically anything which comes from the human body, be it hair or nail clippings, dried umbilical cords, kidney stones, and the like.

C. Project purpose

This research documents the *ex-voto* ritual, examining the *milagres* as artifacts which tell the life stories of the subaltern, those people subordinated within interlocking hierarchies of class, race, ethnicity, and gender. By examining this religious folk tradition, defined in rural shrines scattered across northeast Brazil, this study brings to focus what

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*All figures appear in Appendix B.

this ritual practice reveals about the "dis-ease of the social body" from the perspective of the Northeast's most impoverished and marginalized people.

This ethnographic project focuses on material culture, the *ex-votos*, to tell the stories of the people who make the pilgrimage to Canindé. By using the artifacts as symbols and markers of physical health as well as of social health, a type of epistemology can be developed which illustrates the marginalization of the pilgrims and the wider population they represent. This study adds to the growing literature on votive offerings and their practice in Brazil and around the world and will serve as another link in the historical literature examining the diffusion of the Greco-Roman votive offering tradition throughout Europe and the Americas.

Through this study, encoded meanings related to spirituality, power, and resistance will be elucidated. Forced to live in a world full of uncertainties due to governmental corruption and neglect as well as an inhospitable environment, the majority of the population must assume a position of submission to survive. This study examines the politics of submission that most of the population must negotiate for survival and the silent forms of rebellion that are waged against this social system. One method of ensuring continued survival is by negotiating advantageous religious relationships by repaying divine favors with an *ex-voto*. I argue that this tradition, by precluding intercession from the priest, serves as a form of silent rebellion against the religious hierarchy and instills in the practitioner a sense of empowerment. I also feel that by exploring the therapeutic value of making a tangible symbol of disease and then "giving it away," pilgrims are further empowered by having a direct connection with their recovery. In this way this study has direct correlation to cross-cultural studies of religious objects and has implications in the study of self-healing. Lastly, this study will illustrate the social functions of the *ex-votos* within the pilgrimage community by examining in detail their metaphorical use as symbols, in social organization, and in folk narrative.

In preparation for undertaking my study of the *ex-voto* tradition, I drew from a wealth of sources from many diverse bodies of literature. The classic works of historians and anthropologists of Brazil (Bastide 1951, 1978; Burns 1970; Freyre 1945, 1986; Smith 1970, 1972) laid the foundation of Brazilian history, especially that of the northeastern *sertão*. I did, however, find their unilateral focus on the elite portion of the population to be limiting. These works are informative and reveal much about the political views of Brazil during the first half of this century when Nazi sympathies existed among the elite and a "whitening" of the population was encouraged. Written in the "received view" of the day when the positivist paradigm dominated social science, these works reflected and reinforced colonial ideals. To be sure, I am not saying that these writers were advocates of racial purification. I will say, however, that these works and those by Charles Wagley (1963) and Harry Hutchinson (1957) were monovocal, giving the paternalistic interpretation of the investigator while ignoring the emic voices of those observed. It is important to note that at this same time there were female anthropologists such as Ruth Landes working in Brazil. Her book on the Afro-Brazilian Candomblé community, *City of Women* (1947), was squelched, and she was ostracized from the academic community because of her participatory methodology and her collaboration with Edison Carneiro, a mulatto journalist and researcher. When her book was reprinted in 1994 it was heralded as a seminal work in the field. In the introduction to the reprinted edition, Sally Cole recognizes Landes as a forerunner of postmodern ethnography for her theoretical interests in questions pertaining to race, gender, and sexuality. Diverging from traditional ethnographies of the time, Landes included reflexive comments about her experiences and relationships as well as described "internal conflicts, dialogues, and contestations of meanings in a context of change and fluidity." In addition, "she situated Afro-Brazilian culture in the past - the history of colonial and nineteenth-century slavery and of the urbanization and proletarianization of Brazil" (Cole 1994: viii).

Clifford Geertz's idea that culture should be analyzed through interpretation of meanings, which he illustrated with the metaphor of a "spider web" woven of shared meanings (1973: 5), was taken a step further for me after reading Gerald Sider (1994). Sider's revisionist work with African-Americans and Native Americans shows that these "webs" are indeed woven, but because of hierarchical social organization and the resulting power differential, the meanings they hold are not shared by all members of the culture. Because I looked at the Brazilian *ex-votos* interpretively, I was conscious not only of the meanings they held for the practitioners of the tradition, but also for what these *ex-votos* could mean to the hierarchical powers of the Church and the larger population of Brazilians in general.

Culture and Truth, Rosaldo's book about the "remaking" of social analysis, was both enlightening and liberating to me. His methodology of "processual analysis" considering the interaction of time and space and multiple meanings in research is very compatible with Geertz's interpretive model and made me look at *ex-votos* as more than just objects. His statement, "[r]ituals serve as vehicles for processes that occur both before and after the period of their performance" (1993: 20), forced me to consider the cause and effect of each votive offering and aided in my analysis of the social uses of the *ex-votos*. His work was liberating to me because it recognized and reinforced the conflicting feelings that researchers struggle with in the context of conducting fieldwork.

Insightful works by anthropologists such as Conrad Kottak (1983) and especially Nancy Scheper-Hughes (1985, 1992) helped in my understanding of rural and urban northeastern Brazil by giving voice to the impoverished and reconstructing the politics of social relations. Shepard Forman's (1975) and Allen Johnson's (1971) studies of the lives of rural Brazilian peasantry and their discussions of the delicate balance of the patron/client powerbase also aided in my understanding of this reciprocal yet asymmetrical social institution and helped me recognize its application to Brazilian folk Catholicism.

Unfortunately, there has been very little written about the part of Brazil in which this research is located. The Northeast, an area of about 800,000 square miles, can be divided into three major ecological zones. The first is the *zona da mata*, the coastal lowlands. Then moving inland are the drier transitional zones called the *agreste*, and finally the subject of this study, the backlands, the *sertão*. Much study has been done of the coastal area. It has the richest history, being the major site of colonial settlement. It was also, before the huge agricultural farms to the South were created, the most prominent agricultural region, housing the large sugar plantations. Salvador, the colonial capital and largest city in this region, has been saturated with studies dealing with its rich past. It is the center of Afro-Brazilian culture, and works depicting this zone's religious diversity, regional cuisine, and arts have dominated most major studies of Brazil. The other two *zonas* are far less culturally diverse. Because no major agricultural ventures were possible due to climatic limitations, a relatively small slave population was brought to them. Most of the native populations were wiped out due to colonial diseases or direct aggression, leaving land to be taken over by huge European-owned cattle producing operations. As a result the contemporary population is predominately a European base with various admixtures of Afro-Brazilian and Native American. While residents of these regions, of course, do have traditions and material culture, researchers have historically bypassed these region for the more culturally spectacular coastal region and more recently for the endangered Amazonian region.

There are several studies of the *sertão*, but these focus on the large cattle ranches and farms farther north. Candace Slater's work regarding the miracle stories about the Brazilian folk saint Padre Cicero in the Roman Catholic shrine town of Joazeiro del Norte is based in an urban setting. Padre Cicero (1844-1934), a Roman Catholic priest, developed a large following in the northeastern state of Ceará after a series of "miraculous" events occurred. During the catastrophic drought of 1877-1880, in which

one third of the state's population died or emigrated, Padre Cicero's efforts on behalf of the remaining population gave him wide popularity. After he administered the communion host to a woman during Mass in Joazeiro where the host "turned into the blood of Christ" in her mouth, his fame as a miracle worker spread throughout the Northeast. There followed a long series of miraculous events which were attributed to Padre Cicero. Today his shrine is the most frequented in Northeast Brazil. Because of the popularity of Padre Cicero's shrine, Joazeiro has become a large commercial center for the surrounding rural region (Slater 1986; della Cava 1970; Ribeiro 1992).

There is really no body of literature on Brazil that deals with the part of the *sertão* where Canindé is located. As a result, I turned to writing about comparable agrarian populations with similar political and religious situations, and cycles of poverty. The works of Michael Taussig (1980, 1987, 1993), Jean Comaroff (1985), and James Scott (1986, 1990) while not situated in Brazil, brought insight into struggles and resistance shared by people forced to live in marginalized circumstances. Taussig's concepts of mimesis and alterity as well as commodity fetishism have direct connection with the practice and commodification of the *ex-votos*. Comaroff's study, *Body of Power, Spirit of Resistance* about the interaction of power and praxis in the religious and secular struggles of the Tshidi in South Africa and Botswana in many ways mirrors the struggle of the practitioners of Brazilian folk Catholicism. Both groups have used their religion to create visually and intellectually encoded signs that act as a unifying force against state and religious hierarchies. Oppositional behaviors Scott described in *Weapons of the Weak* such as silence, feigned humility, an attitude of ignorance, pilfering, and work done slowly or badly were discernible in Canindé; consequently his concept of "everyday forms of resistance" was easily applicable to my field site. Without exposure to these works prior to my time in Brazil, I would have missed many subtleties of life there.

No holistic studies of Brazilian *ex-votos* have been published. Most works are either exhibition catalogs or chapters in books dealing with general folk art studies, and few of these are in English. Two articles by Bercht and Frota appear in the 1989 *House of Miracles* exhibition catalog from the Americas Society Art Gallery in New York. Mota (1968) and Cardoso (1983) are two additional Brazilian writers who have done work on this subject. These works set the stage for cross-cultural comparisons by Marion Oettinger (1990, 1992, 1997), Martha Egan (1991), and Eileen Oktavec (1995) on the *milagro* tradition in other parts of Latin America, Spain, and the United States.

In situating this research in the broader field of Brazilian religious heterodoxy, Ruth Landes' work on Candomblé (1947), Diana De G. Brown's exploration of Umbanda (1979, 1986, 1987), and David Hess' study of Spiritism (1990, 1994) were very helpful. Most helpful, however, was the guidance of Brazilian anthropologist and psychiatrist Adalberto Barreto without which this work could not have been undertaken. Dr. Barreto acted as my field supervisor and key informant. Recognized as the native expert on the *ex-voto* tradition in Canindé, Dr. Barreto suggested that I approach this topic by examining the social roles the *ex-votos* serve in the pilgrim population. Dr. Barreto's vast body of work on the *ex-votos* and their relevance in the areas of psychiatry and public health is the most complete study of this tradition to date. He generously made copies of several of his unpublished and published documents, newspaper articles, and more importantly, gave his time to me.

My documentation of the *ex-voto* tradition in Canindé occurred between May and November of 1996. My field methods and my reasons for choosing them are discussed in Chapter 2. In that chapter is a detailed description of my field site and a reflexive explanation of my positionality as a field researcher and a middle-class white North American female. Issues with which I struggled such as culture shock, authorship, and faith are discussed.

In Chapter 3, I define the roles that the *ex-voto* tradition plays in the lives, individually and collectively, of its practitioners. I have broken the chapter down into subheadings reflective of these roles. By taking an inventory of the physical afflictions depicted by *ex-votos* I was able to discern the underlying social ills. Utilizing both my observations and stories pilgrims told me, I will discuss these physio-social ills in detail. In the same fashion, the roles of religious reinforcement, social reciprocity, and folk narrative are also explored in this chapter.

The aesthetics and materials used to create the *ex-votos* and the different modes of fulfilling the spiritual contracts are discussed in Chapter 4. In addition, I describe both the mass-produced, commercially crafted *ex-votos* which are beginning to appear in Canindé as well as the traditional, hand-crafted, one-of-a-kind *milagres*. At the end of the chapter are brief biographies of the four local *ex-voto* carvers with whom I spoke.

In Chapter 5 the life of the typical *sertanejo* (resident of the *sertão*, backlander) is discussed. The politics of marginality and poverty and the roles they play in the folk Catholicism practiced by the pilgrims are detailed. Also, the politics of the institutional Church as opposed to the popular and folk ideologies of the people are outlined. Lastly, the power struggle between the Church and local government for control of Canindé and the anxiety this causes the pilgrims is discussed.

In the last chapter I expand upon points highlighted throughout the text. These conclusions cover such topics as the social and cultural construction of disease and cross-cultural examples of the healing power of art and the therapeutic value of the *ex-votos*. I also discuss the *ex-voto* tradition in Brazil and offer suggestions as to its particular manifestation in Canindé.

In the appendix, I provide a map of Northeast Brazil, a copy of the questionnaire that I used in Canindé, as well as all graphs and statistical information taken from the questionnaires.

Chapter 2

METHODOLOGY

In the introduction to *Celebration: Studies in Festivity and Ritual*, Victor Turner writes of the "inner significance" of objects, of their "eloquent silences" that "cry out for interpretation" (p. 11). When I read this statement I knew exactly what he was speaking of, because I felt this way about the Brazilian *ex-votos* the first time I saw them. I was in a medical anthropology class and the professor brought in a box of his collected *ex-votos*. As he held them up we, as a class, tried to surmise what medical problem underlay the creation of each one. If there were obvious signs of physical trauma the object could "speak to us" and we could narrow down causation. However, in many cases trauma was ambiguous or missing and we were left with only "eloquent silence." I made the decision to investigate the *ex-votos*, to listen to their stories and record them, thereby giving voice to the "silence" behind these intensely powerful works of art. This decision led me to travel to Canindé, where I spent almost six months observing and talking with people who had come to the shrine of *São Francisco das Chagas* to "pay their promise" to St. Francis.

A. Field site

Canindé is about three hours inland from Fortaleza, the coastal capital of Ceará. It is in the desolate northeastern backlands area called the *sertão*. The Northeast was the site for the earliest European colonization of Brazil in the sixteenth century. The coastal plains were ideal locations for growing the valuable crop of sugar cane, which eventually allowed Portugal to become the leading sugar producer in the world. However, as competitive sugar production grew stronger in the Caribbean, Brazilian market prices fell and the

culture built on sugar plantations and slave economy came to an end. This decline resulted in much of the coastal population moving into the semi-arid interior, where the government encouraged new settlement. Subsistence agriculture and cattle raising became the principal economic activities (Pang 1989; Robock 1975). With this influx of population the periodic droughts that traditionally plagued this interior region became a more serious problem. As this is a semi-arid region, not a desert, rainfall is usually 20-30 inches per year. This is insufficient rain to support successful commercial agriculture and often not enough to irrigate a small crop garden (Robock 1963). When the rains come, they are abundant but short-lived. The parched earth is impenetrable, leaving the rains to flashflood and then evaporate, making irrigation impossible. The times of *sêcas* (drought) are catastrophic, but even so, "the most basic problem of the Northeast is not the periodic drought but continuing poverty" (Robock 1963: 8). Per capita incomes in the Northeast are the lowest in Brazil, making this region the largest area of poverty in South America (Robock 1975). Subsistence agriculture leaves no room for error, be that human or from nature. In times of drought, the hunger and misery that are synonymous with this region become amplified. In recent years the government has attempted to ameliorate living conditions in the *sertão* by building small reservoirs to hold water for times of severe drought, but corruption, graft, and the overwhelming magnitude of the problem have made these attempts ineffectual.

People are starving. The small-time local farmer historically has grown foodstuff for the local and national market while the large farms produce for export. Gradually, more and more land has been transferred to agribusiness for international markets, leaving the yeoman, sharecropper, and tenant farmer without land. This in turn has created a shortage in food. Urban markets have more money with which to buy food, leaving a critical deficit in rural areas. With the absence of any national or state social services, many people resort to other sources for help. *São Francisco das Chagas*, St. Francis of Wounds, serves as

one source of aid to which many people turn. During my stay in Canindé, I spoke with literally hundreds of people who credited St. Francis with either healing them or facilitating a positive solution to a problem. These problems ranged from serious issues of health, domestic violence, substance abuse, homelessness, and unemployment to lighter issues of romance, school performance level, athletic events, or lost objects. In all cases, total credit for solving the problem was given to St. Francis, even when assistance had been forthcoming from other institutions such as the medical or legal professions (Figure 2).

Pilgrims come to Canindé from all over the northeast to fulfill their promise to St. Francis (Figure 3). *Pagando os promessas* (paying the promises) can be accomplished in several ways. For many people the sacrifices and hardships they make to undertake the long journey to Canindé fulfills their promise; others choose different activities. I observed women cutting off their beautiful hair, people circumambulating the Basilica on their knees, purchasing and lighting candles, carrying heavy crosses, wearing brown robes emulating that of St. Francis, walking distances with heavy stones on their heads, and lighting fireworks. However, the most prevalent way of paying the promise is by creating a mimetic *ex-voto* representative of the promise and depositing it in the receptacle in the *Casa dos Milagres*, the House of Miracles. It was to study this transient pilgrim population that I went to Canindé.

Once in Canindé, I realized that it was an unusual town, reminiscent of a "company town." In this case the company was the Catholic Church. Because of the shortage of land, many people are left homeless, or their situation is so desperate that they must move elsewhere in order to survive. Urban areas are filled with shanty towns, *favelas*, that house the poor. Most of the *favela* residents are migrants from rural areas who have come to the city in hopes of finding a better life. Unfortunately, many people are only trading one desperate situation for another. Another alternative that many people have

taken is to move to places like Canindé, where the Church will take care of them. For several generations, individuals and entire families have come to Canindé knowing that the Church will take them in, give them shelter, food, and even employment. Most of the land and the houses in Canindé are owned by the Catholic Church and administered by the Franciscan order. These houses are given to those who need them. To my knowledge, there are no homeless people in Canindé. Every morning the parish office feeds all the parish workers and anyone else who needs a meal. There are two full time day-care centers that feed pre-school children breakfast and lunch everyday while their parents are employed in some fashion by the parish. Women serve as cooks, housekeepers, and laundresses for the monastery, or work in parish owned operations such as the hospital, an old age sanitarium, a religious conference facility, parish offices, day care centers, or in the main shrine complex of buildings. If they have education they are employed as secretaries in the parish offices and some municipal offices or work the religious bookstore. Men work as drivers for a few of the priests and perform gardening and maintenance duties. The Church also owns several restaurants, a zoo, and a small museum that employs several men and women. There seems to be an endless supply of jobs to be filled, and rarely are people supported who choose not to work. For example, when I arrived in Canindé, the monastery was being painted. It had just been painted a few years before and did not look as though it needed painting. At first I thought, how vain, how selfish of the Church to waste money on such a luxury when people are going hungry. Then I realized that by painting the monastery, and then the Parish offices, and then the hospital, men were allowed to receive aid from the Church and keep a sense of self-respect. Almost everyone that I knew in Canindé worked for the Church in some capacity. As you might imagine, they had a great sense of loyalty to the Church and the priests. The only antagonistic relationship in the town seems to be between some of the city government officials and the Church over control of the city's future.

Canindé has become a major shrine site in Northeast Brazil. In fact, after Assisi it is the most visited shrine dedicated to St. Francis in the world. As a result, it has grown into a fairly large town of about 25,000 people. There are five schools, a regional hospital, and a fairly substantial commercial district that has branches of the two most prominent banks in the Northeast. The current Basilica, which replaced an earlier chapel, was built in 1910. In 1925 the Vatican declared the *Santuário de São Francisco das Chagas* a Basilica, and during 1926-27 improvements which created the current cruciform floorplan were made on the structure. The rococo interior plaster work was installed in 1945. The Basilica is an imposing building. It towers over every other building in the town and can be seen from miles away. It is situated so that it catches a breeze through the four side doors, and the long rows of pews are often the coolest place in town to sit. Adjacent are the House of Miracles, the parish offices, and the religious bookstore. In front of the Basilica is a huge square, half of which is a park with benches, the other half covered in paving stones. On Sundays, this paved area becomes a parking lot for the buses and trucks full of pilgrims. On the outside of the square are souvenir shops and luncheonettes which cater to the religious visitors. The souvenir shops also hire young boys to sell religious trinkets to the visitors. The boys carry big wooden posts in the shape of a cross. On these crosses are plastic keychains in day-glo colors that say something about Canindé, St. Francis, or the shrine, small plastic statues of St. Francis, and brightly colored *fitas*. *Fitas* can be purchased outside any major shrine or cathedral in Brazil. They are ribbons printed with the name of whatever saint is celebrated at a particular location and are the cheapest souvenir one can buy. There is a ritual that has grown around these *fitas* which gives them a kind of magic all their own. When you buy a *fita*, you can use it to make a wish. You make the wish and then wrap the *fita* around your wrist or ankle tying a knot after each round, until you have three knots. Then you cannot remove the *fita* until it literally rots off. Doing so would not only make your wish not come true, but would bring forth

untold misfortune. If you leave the *fita* in place, your wish will supposedly come true. You see people of all classes, races, and genders wearing these *fitas* in every part of Brazil.

The House of Miracles is one large room that opens to the paved area around the Basilica by huge metal gates that roll into the ceiling, making one side of the room almost entirely open. Another side of the room is fronted by large wooden bins. It is into these bins that the *ex-votos* are deposited. Above the bins are large photographs of the Italian town of Assisi and the shrine dedicated to St. Francis of Assisi. The long wall parallel to the open side is completely covered with photographs left by pilgrims. There is a small room behind this large room which displays some of the more spectacular *ex-votos* which have been left over the years. In the room there is a sign that explains that such *ex-votos* can be seen in the small museum near the monastery. Behind the wall where the bins are located is a room where pilgrims can give their confessions to a priest.

B. Field sight

When I got off the bus in Canindé it was midday. It was the time of *soneca*, the nap that comes in the middle of the day, to escape the blistering heat. No one was on the street. The sun was so bright, so intense, that I was blinded. I stumbled into the meager hotel across from where the bus let me out and tried to figure out how long my money would hold out if I had to pay for lodging. A few days later, my own miracles had occurred: I was welcomed into the monastery and did not have to worry about finances. I went to the *Casa dos Milagres* everyday and could actually make myself understood. I felt I was progressing in my fieldwork, that the dreaded culture shock was being held at bay. I missed family and friends back home, but my homesickness was not too bad. The worst thing was how much I missed my cat, Percy. On my first Sunday in Canindé, I was

sitting in the monastery courtyard reading and preparing myself for the crowd of pilgrims that I was told flocked to the shrine on Sundays, when I noticed a white cat in the garden. I walked over to it, delighted with the thoughts of having a cat friend, when I noticed it was acting strangely. Upon closer inspection, I realized it was very sick. I ran to find a priest, but they were all at the Cathedral. I ran to talk with the women who worked in the kitchen, and they seemed unconcerned. I asked where the veterinarian lived, the animal doctor, and the concept was foreign to them. I ran, literally, to the Cathedral, found a priest, told him about the cat, only to find him unconcerned as well. Anger welled up in me. All of a sudden, I hated these people; they were ignorant barbarians. I went back to the monastery and sat, sobbing uncontrollably, and watched the poor cat in its death throes. I cried the entire rest of the day, but slowly I realized the blindness of culture shock that I had been unknowingly walking around with. I realized that in a situation where existence is a daily struggle, where just getting a child to live through infancy was an accomplishment, caring if a stray cat lived or died was a luxury these people could not afford. I got it. Here was a different world from what I, a middle class white woman from the United States, was familiar with. Shaken and humbled, I finally began to see.

Every day, I would walk the several blocks from the Franciscan monastery, *Cônvento Santo Antônio*, where I was staying, to the city center where the Basilica was located. At first, I was an object of scrutiny by the locals and the pilgrims, and some days I felt that I was walking the gauntlet. It was obvious to all that I was not the normal visitor. My height and light skin, not to mention a backpack full of expensive camera equipment, a tape recorder, and a notebook in which I was forever writing, singled me out to everyone as foreign (dare I say that **I** was the Other?). The townspeople quickly learned that I was staying at the *cônvento*, which gave me legitimacy. And after my "cat episode," which everyone knew about within a few hours, I, too, seemed to be seen more clearly. From that time forward, I was treated more as a person, rather than a stranger. I was

kidded about cats for the duration of my stay by everyone from the priests to the man working in the post office. Interestingly, most people living in Canindé assumed I was a nun because I wore shapeless clothes, no makeup, and wore my long hair up rather than down over my shoulders as was the fashion for unmarried Brazilian women of my age group. After I became friends with several of the women and young girls in town, they repeatedly tried to persuade me to wear my long hair down and to apply make-up in an attempt to "improve" my appearance.

Each day I would sit or stand in the House of Miracles and observe people. At first, I was hesitant to talk with people, not wanting to encroach upon what I assumed was a very private moment. Soon it became clear to me that the quiet, meditative behavior that I expected to accompany the deposition of an *ex-voto*, did not necessarily happen, and that people enjoyed my approaching them and asking them questions. In the United States, the secular and the sacred are compartmentalized in different spaces both physically and psychologically. In northeast Brazil, this is not the case; religion is integrated into life, not just a part of it. For example, I assumed before going to Brazil that the *ex-votos*, since they were the material manifestation of a sacred vow, would be considered sacred and therefore treated reverentially. After talking with many people and observing their behavior, it became apparent that this was not the case. All people told me that *ex-votos* were simply *"arte popular"* and that examples of sacred art were the plaster religious statues that could be purchased at all the souvenir shops that surround the cathedral. Of course, whenever people purchased these statues, they brought them to a priest to be blessed, which did not happen in the offering of an *ex-voto*. From this, I must assume that it was only the priest's blessing that "activated" the sacredness of the statues, while it was the *promessa* that was sacred in the votive tradition and not the *ex-voto* itself.

I cannot generalize about the behavior of people around the *ex-votos* because it did vary. Some people got down on their knees and prayed when they offered their *milagres*;

some people cried. Other people would run in and literally throw their *ex-votos* in the bin and leave, most likely to frequent one of the many shops or even one of the *cabarets* (nightclub/houses of prostitution) located in the *barros* (neighborhoods) not owned by the Church. People could be laughing one minute and praying the next. In most cases behavior did not seem to visually change during the act of depositing their *ex-voto*.

The variation of the objects themselves was endless. For someone interested in folk art and especially interested in how people might envision their disease, it was like a new exhibit and psychological study each day. The problem for me, however, was how to define the aesthetics of a genre that has no distinctive aesthetic criteria. Each object is crafted by a different individual, who in most cases has no familiarity with art other than religious statuary and images. The votive offerings are not made to last; in most cases the "life" of an *ex-voto* is a brief one. At the end of each pilgrimage season the *ex-votos* are destroyed. They are taken to a property the monastery owns on the outskirts of Canindé and burned. The reason for their destruction, I was told by Frei Baptista, is because of the sheer mass deposited each year. A few are saved, curated out of the bin; selected in most cases for their technical merit. These select few are destined to be included in the collections of museums and individuals around the world.

When I queried pilgrims about the destruction of the *ex-votos*, they were not disturbed. Most people responded that the *milagres* are forgotten once they are deposited. From these responses, it would appear that the works are created purely to fulfill the contract made between St. Francis and the pilgrim. The *ex-voto* can be viewed as a type of spiritual currency used to pay off a divine debt. While aesthetics may influence the object's creation, it is not the foremost criterion. A successful image is one that can be recognized as representative of the problem (Figure 4). While it is true that some people would examine the *milagres* deposited in the bin and judge them "*bem*" (good) or "*feio*" (ugly), this evaluation usually referred to an arbitrary value or taste rather

than artistic technique. Some of the *ex-votos* that I thought were wonderful were deemed ugly by other people. Could I, an outsider in the culture, in the faith, and in the *ex-voto* tradition, work with these objects without looking at them with Western value judgments? Could I see them in the same light as insiders? The answer is that I really could not, and that the bias of a Western-trained art historian/folklorist/anthropologist came to the field with me. This realization was my jumping off point, a point from which I tried to grow and develop my field sight.

C. Field methods

After reading many ethnographies during the course of my study, I realized that the works that impacted me challenged the prescribed research by earlier anthropologists in the area of cultural ownership and ethnographic authority. It was very important to me that I in no way appropriated information given to me by informants. I wanted to represent their stories and votive tradition in such a way that it remained theirs and did not become merely my academic gold mine. I have worked very hard to report the information that I gleaned in such a way that it would be recognizable to them: devoid of jargon and my own philosophical applications.

Works by Ruth Behar (1990, 1996) and Karen McCarthy Brown (1991) were models for me to follow because they encourage other anthropologists to write collaboratively and polyvocally and to contribute to the academic discipline without being limited to only that audience. I would be honored to collaborate with Dr. Barreto in future efforts and have attempted to express the "voices" of the *romeros* in this work by quoting them directly. I feel very strongly about the importance of sharing the work of cultural anthropology with the general public and have avoided writing in such a way that would limit readership to only those with keys to decode academic jargon.

My decision to use material culture as a vehicle for narration was influenced by the work of Barbara Babcock (1982, 1986) who for years has worked with Cochiti potter Helen Cordero. Mrs. Cordero feels that each of her pieces truly does have a story to tell, and those stories are told to her as she fashions each one from clay. Another influence towards seeing the *ex-votos* as more than mute, inanimate objects came from reading Appadurai's thoughts on the social life of things (1986). *Ex-votos* have a transient social life, moving from a form of divine currency to one of varying other "social statuses." Many pieces are de-activated upon deposition and wait to be destroyed. Others are recycled: reborn as *ex-votos* of other pilgrims who, not bringing one with them, choose an appropriate *milagre* from the bin and after personalizing it, re-deposit it. Others are commodified as a valued art form, or in the case of objects such as crutches, eyeglasses, or clothing, given to someone in need. In my research, I take each of these different "lives" into consideration.

Upon getting to Canindé, I realized that several research questions in my proposed field study were not feasible. I had intended to work with several local *ex-voto* carvers as primary informants. I did speak with four local carvers, and two of them on several occasions. However, once in Canindé it became obvious that they did not carve many *ex-votos* during the course of a pilgrimage season. My study group, the pilgrims, were coming from other locations and were either making their own votive offerings or obtaining them from a source outside of Canindé. I realized that information from the carvers would be important, but that I needed to change my methodology to allow focusing on the pilgrims instead.

Focusing on the pilgrims had its own drawbacks. Dealing with primarily a transient population meant that I would not really ever have time to develop a sense of rapport with a pilgrim. I would approach them and talk with them for about fifteen or twenty minutes at the most, and then never see them again. I would have no one to corroborate their

story, and for the most part have no sort of snowballing network leading to new informants. However, such leads were not actually necessary, because each pilgrim's story was in itself corroborative of the stories of others. Each story I heard was similar in that they all reiterated the same conditions of poverty. Each person's story of a hurt foot, or cut hand, or chronic pain validated what someone else had previously told me. As a result, even though the people I spoke with only represented a fraction of the total population of the *sertão*, the stories they told me were all so similar I feel safe that I have a fair sampling of the pilgrim population.

In talking with the pilgrims I was interested in obtaining an emic viewpoint about the aesthetics of the *ex-votos* they brought to Canindé as well as those brought by others. I am sure that my own aesthetics played a role in which artifacts were chosen for further exploration. When I saw someone with an *ex-voto* that intrigued me, I attempted to talk with that person rather than someone who had an *ex-voto* that did not interest me.

Another variable to keep in mind is that I was subject, as is every anthropologist, to speaking with only the people willing to speak with me. There were only a handful of people who refused to speak with me. Usually it was just the opposite; rather than having too few people to talk with, I was often surrounded by people wanting me to record their story. At the time, I was reminded of a similar experience Nancy Scheper-Hughes recorded about her experience with the people in Alto do Cruzeiro. She said the people there had no representation and no opportunity to be heard and counted on her to give their stories a voice that would be heard (1992:28). I feel the weight of that responsibility now.

While in Canindé, I went through a period of feeling like a parasite. Brazilians were giving me food and shelter and information while I was giving them nothing back. It felt almost voyeuristic to be in Brazil documenting a religious tradition when I could have been doing something much more beneficial. With the opportunities that had been

available to me as a middle class white North American, I felt it was criminal that I should be there and not have a skill like medical training to alleviate the suffering I saw. After I was in Canindé for a while, I gradually recognized a different type of suffering shared by the people I talked with. It was the pain of not being heard or seen, and in many ways, this pain was more insidious than physical suffering. Perhaps, it is true that my relationship with the pilgrims was somewhat parasitic in that it enabled my academic future. However, I hope that with my telling of their stories our relationship will become one of symbiosis, and these nameless voices will be heard and the social and political situations which cause their physical and mental pains will be broken down.

The acoustics in the House of Miracles were not conducive to recording interviews on tape. If the room was full, it was very hard to even carry on a conversation. Also, because I did not get to speak with people for great lengths of time, I felt people would be more comfortable if I listened to their stories and wrote down key points as we spoke, filling in each story at first chance. As a result, I recorded the "voice" of the *ex-votos* by listening and writing notes regarding the conversations I had with pilgrims. I asked them questions about their medical problem, their living situation, their occupation, and their health care selection. Each pilgrim's story was anonymous. I never asked any pilgrims their names, neither in interviews nor on the questionnaire. Since in most cases I was interviewing someone who did not live in Canindé, with whom I would only be speaking for a matter of minutes, and from whom I expected to have no further contact, a name was not important. It made people happy when I wrote down things while speaking with them. It in some way verified that I was seriously interested in their story. If I did not write down their story — when they had seen me write down bits from the person I spoke with previously — it truly seemed to hurt them. In addition to written records, I tried to photograph as many pilgrims with their *milagres* as possible. Each time I took a photograph of a pilgrim with my 35mm camera, I also took a photograph with a Polaroid Instamatic camera. I

would then give the pilgrim the photograph. A crowd of people always gathered watching the picture slowly appear from the blank grey sheet: the *milagre* of modern technology.

I taped interviews with anthropologist Dr. Adalberto Barreto, three *freis*, one physician, and two *ex-voto* carvers. For each interview I came prepared with a list of questions already translated into Portuguese. For three of the interviews I was accompanied by Kendle Nickels, the son of an American missionary living in Canindé, who acted as a translator. The perspective of the *ex-voto* tradition from the "official" clergy was interesting. In all cases, the *freis* spoke rather patronizingly about the people they ministered and suggested the votive ritual was childlike, but harmless. Both the physician and the *freis* were insistent that poverty was the greatest problem in the Northeast and placed great blame upon the government for ignoring the problem. Dr. Barreto, himself a child of the *sertão* having grown up in Canindé, has an interesting perspective on the situation. He says that the people of the Northeast are "residents of the nation of St. Francis," not Brazil. He says that since they are so poor, they pay no taxes, have no driver's license, nor any legal identification as Brazilians. In addition, they receive no institutional benefits from the government. Instead, they pay all their tribute to St. Francis and turn to him for the types of institutional aid they should be receiving from the government. It is to St. Francis that they give their surplus money and it is to him they go for food, shelter, and medical problems. To the pilgrims, St. Francis is a living entity. There is a Latin American folk saying, "A saint who is not seen is not worshipped" (Toor 1947: 541). This saying certainly applies to St. Francis. Pilgrims "see" St. Francis walking in the Basilica and sit outside the monastery hoping to catch a glimpse of him. Across the front of the monastery is painted, "*Casa de São Francisco*." Many a time, I left the gates of the monastery and was asked by those waiting, "*Sao Francisco esta en casa?*" (Is St. Francis home?). At first, I assumed that I had not understood the question. However, I soon came to expect such questions and usually gently replied that "*Não, São*

Francisco não esta en casa hoje" (No, St. Francis is not home today). As my Portuguese improved, I would occasionally hear pilgrims talking together, asking if one had seen St. Francis. The other might reply, "Oh, no, I'm not good enough to see him, but I know someone who has." Most people had a type of dualistic view of St. Francis walking here among them and residing in heaven as well. They were very territorial about his being located in Canindé while on earth. Even though there were pictures of the shrine in Assisi, Italy, in the House of Miracles, and the *freis* instructed about St. Francis of Assisi being the "original" St. Francis, the people would have none of that. *São Francisco das Chagas do Canindé* was THE only St. Francis that they were interested in. I found out that the pilgrims could get quite huffy if I questioned them on this matter.

In addition to informal interviews with pilgrims and formal interviews with representatives from health care professionals, the clergy, and carvers, I administered questionnaires to the pilgrims during the week of the *Romaria a Canindé* (Pilgrimage to Canindé), October 4 to 14, 1996. With the help of four young men (two sons of the American missionary and two Brazilians), we canvassed three hundred pilgrims in five days. Kendle Nickels and his brother Daniel helped me with the statistical analysis. Although not based on probability sampling, this quantitative data set offers some descriptive statistical context for situating this ethnography of a pilgrim population in the greater population of the Brazilian Northeast and provides figures for comparisons with pilgrim populations elsewhere. The statistical results of these questionnaires are detailed in the Appendix.

My research questions were influenced by the works of academics from the fields of anthropology and folklore. Clifford Geertz's use of "thick description" in the interpretation of culture was a format which matched my personal research goals (1973: 6-10). By looking at the behavior of practitioners of the *ex-voto* tradition, I was able to create a document which described the tradition in such a way as could be understood by others. In creating such a document, I listened to what practitioners and others told me

about the tradition, but in addition, to paraphrase the works of Geertz, I looked at what the practitioners did because it is in the "flow of behavior that cultural forms find articulation" (1973: 17). I also looked to Geertz's concept that culture is "semiotic," and in particular, his example of a Balinese Cockfight as a metaphor for Balinese culture (1973: 412-453). This was a paradigmatic model for my idea to use pilgrimage and the *ex-votos* as a metaphor for the pilgrim culture of *São Francisco*. Cockfighting in Bali is an activity of lower-class males. It serves as a release valve for repression and allows the venting of pent up frustrations. Cockfighting permits them to act out unacceptable emotions and for this reason serves a therapeutic function in Balinese culture. Similarly, the marginalized peasant population of the Brazilian Northeast cannot complain about the social ills from which they suffer. Instead, the hundreds of *ex-votos* illustrate their cries for help. The process of entering into a contract with *São Francisco*, feeling a sense of resolution that he has acted on their behalf, the crafting of the *ex-voto*, and the eventual sense of closure given with the deposition in the House of Miracles are acts of great therapeutic value for these individuals. More importantly, both of these activities, the cockfight and the votive tradition, are interpretive. Both of these activities are full of shared semantics and meanings for their practitioners.

I built upon this idea after reading Burawoy's extended case study research method (1991). This method which combines data collected through participant observation with situational information regarding economic, political, and social constructs is very adaptable to my discussion of the underlying social dis-ease in northeastern Brazil. I have chosen not only to examine the *ex-voto* tradition as it exists today, but to take an historical look at the tradition and how it has changed over the years to fit the needs of its practitioners. I have also chosen to examine the religious and secular political situations in which the pilgrims struggle to see if and how these struggles have shaped the votive tradition. Using the extended case method enabled me to provide a clearer picture of how

the *ex-voto* tradition serves as a vehicle for resistance against the domination of the Brazilian social and religious hierarchy. After I have spent time in other Brazilian shrines where the *ex-voto* tradition is practiced, the extended case method will become more fully realized. I will compare how the votive practice and/or the *ex-votos* may or may not vary from place to place, and what role exterior forces play in the possible changes. Through this comparison, I will have a clearer picture of the *ex-voto* tradition and its social role in the lives of its practitioners.

Since I was able to sample only a portion of the population of the *sertão*, specifically only those pilgrims who visited Canindé, I combined Abu-Lughod's philosophy of "writing against culture by focusing on ethnography of the particular" (1991) with Burawoy's methodology of looking for "macro determination in the micro world" (1991: 279). Both of these methodologies avoid making widesweeping generalizations about cultures by focusing on information given by a few informants and writing about just those few and even sharing authorship with them. By so doing, an accurate picture is given about a few members of the target population rather than using information to make positivist statements about culture as a whole.

The issue of anonymity was not a problem with the pilgrims, as I did not ask their names. I felt that changing the name of my fieldsite would be disingenuous, and feel it is important that it should be recognized as the haven it is for the impoverished it harbors. I have not changed the names of anyone with the exception of the displaced farm workers organizer whom I call João Cabral, which I changed for his protection. In all other cases, individuals are identified by their actual names.

Chapter 3

THE SOCIAL FUNCTIONS OF *EX-VOTOS*

While it is true that the *ex-voto* tradition serves an important religious function in the folk Catholic culture of Northeastern Brazil, it is my hypothesis that the *ex-voto* tradition functions as more than just a religious ritual for its practitioners. I believe that it is, in fact, the paradigmatic symbol of the pilgrim population of the "nation" of St. Francis. As pilgrims come to the House of Miracles they stand at the *ex-voto* bin and look at the offerings. By examining different *milagres* and seeing their sheer mass, each pilgrim is reminded that there are others like her/him. The volume of *milagres* demonstrate that even though s/he might be ignored by the secular establishment, s/he is indeed a member of the powerful spiritual community of St. Francis. In this way the *ex-votos* are emblematic and reinforce a sense of "communitas" in much the same way a flag does for other nations. In addition, I believe that the *ex-votos* and the miracle stories that grow out of them serve as what Geertz calls "metasocial commentaries." Their function is interpretive and allows the pilgrims to view them as a tangible example of their own experiences while the stories that become part of the oral tradition are in essence "stor[ies] they tell themselves about themselves" (Geertz 1973: 448). In the following pages I will illustrate other social functions that this *ex-voto* tradition provides for its practitioners. These will include exposing the underlying social dis-ease of the region by exhibiting a disease patterning of poverty-driven medical problems, acting as links in the chain connecting the spiritual community of St. Francis throughout the Northeast, reinforcing horizontal social networks through reciprocity, and maintaining an active oral folk narrative tradition surrounding the miracles of St. Francis.

A. Social dis-ease reflected in the epidemiology of the *ex-votos*

Dr. Barreto, through his more than fifteen year inventory, has recognized a direct connection between the health related problems suffered by the impoverished population of the Brazilian Northeast and the *ex-votos* that are deposited at Canindé. I undertook this project because of his suggestion that I examine the *ex-votos* as material clues to socially generated health problems. After observing living conditions in this area and looking at the hundreds of *ex-votos* that were offered during the pilgrimage season of 1996, I came to the conclusions upon which I will elaborate in the following pages.

Ex-votos are offered to represent literally any body part that is imaginable. Many *milagres* represent injuries to the hands and feet. Almost all of the people living in this part of the Northeast wear only rubber thongs or flip-flops on their feet. Without gloves and in this type of footwear, they must work the fields with sharp machetes and hoes, work construction lifting heavy bricks and avoiding sharp nails, or work around animals avoiding heavy hoofs and piles of excrement. This is the story that one man told me.

> I was working in a small *usina*, sugarcane factory. The mill consisted of an electricity powered drive belt which led the sugarcane into the rotary blades that crushed the juice out of the cane. I do this same job day after day, loading cane onto the drive belt and running it through the grinder. The monotony of the job makes my mind wander which is not a good thing, because there is no safety switch on the machine, and I have no safety gloves. One day, before I knew what was happening, I saw my fingers going into the blades. I could feel them cutting my fingers. I knew I would lose my hand. I would lose my job. I screamed, '*São Francisco ajuda me*' [St. Francis

help me.] At that exact moment, the machine cut off. My hand was saved and my fingers were barely cut. I made this hand with blood [red paint] on the fingertips to thank St. Francis for saving my hand.

In this region, full of pricking cactus thorns and biting insects, even the natural environment is hazardous. These conditions combined with polluted water and poor sanitation create infections that are hard to heal. Children walk around with running sores left on their arms and legs by mosquito bites. Walking is, for most *sertanejos*, the only mode of transportation. Traveling the hardpacked dirt roads dries the skin on the feet to such an extent that they simply split open, creating another prime location for infection. *Ex-votos* with missing fingers and toes; misshapen hands, feet, and ankles; gaping wounds; infected insect bites; and dermatological problems reflect the poverty and hazardous working conditions in which most people of the Northeast toil.

Ex-votos depicting feet and legs comprise the largest number of offerings. Second in frequency of deposition are *ex-votos* illustrating heads (Figure 5). Many are carved complete with facial characteristics, while others have features drawn or painted on. Still others have no facial characteristics at all. Some are painted to reflect skin tone, while others are painted colors not found in nature. Some people use cuttings of their own hair on these *ex-votos*, others ignore this feature all together. In a few cases, the heads are cut out with a jig saw, and a photograph or a drawing is glued to the front. Many of these heads show signs of physical trauma and tell stories ranging from cuts suffered in a bicycle wreck; to hemorrhaging from the ears, symptomatic of high fevers suffered with dengue; to more simple dermatological problems. There are, however, heads that are mute and give no hints as to why they have been offered. While some of these non-descriptive *ex-votos* may signify that healing has been accomplished, when I spoke with several pilgrims who offered such examples, they usually told me they had suffered from headaches, a

malady not easily depicted. Several pilgrims had received medical treatment for this malady, but in most instances they said that their doctors had been unable to find a medical basis for their recurrent headaches or their treatment had given them no relief. It was only after asking St. Francis for help that their headaches stopped. Dr. Barreto attributes these headaches to anxiety, reflective of the increasing rise in inflation and the corresponding decreasing of the quality of life for the impoverished in this region. In cataloging the *ex-votos* for the past several years he has seen a rise in the number of heads without discernible trauma. In an article from a Fortaleza newspaper, *O Diário do Nordeste* dated January 3, 1994, Barreto stated that in 1984 he counted 1,278 such *ex-votos*, while in 1992 the number was up to 6,640.

Ex-votos depicting a problem with the breast are also very numerous. These are most often deposited by younger women. Because of their age, I assumed that they suffered from lactation problems. The *sertão* has, as do many third world countries, problems with drought and the resulting health problem of dehydration. If a woman is not receiving an adequate nutritional and fluid supply, she may not provide enough milk for her nursing children. While my assumption of lactation problems was partly accurate, most of these *ex-votos* are being offered because of a problem that results from too much nursing rather than the inability to nurse. I became aware of this problem after talking with Dr. Barreto, and this information was corroborated over and over as I spoke with more women. I remember one woman in particular because her *ex-voto* was unusual. It was a Sunday morning, but the busloads of people had not yet arrived. I noticed her handling her offering very gingerly and walked over to see it better. She had made a depiction of her breast by cutting off the top of a green plastic liter bottle of *Guarana*, a Brazilian soft drink. She had then made a type of plaster out of flour and water. She had dipped pieces of gauze in the mixture and applied them to the plastic bottle top. She had just made the *ex-voto* that morning and the plaster was still wet, so she was trying to keep

it from getting all over her hands when she deposited it in the receptacle in the House of Miracles. We began talking and I asked her about the *ex-voto*. This is the story she told me.

> Several months ago she had found a lump in her breast. She was too frightened to go to the doctor for fear that he would remove her breast. She had two small children, and she was afraid that her husband would leave her if the doctor removed her breast. She appealed to St. Francis to help her, and she promised that if he would make the lump in her breast go away that she would make a *milagre* for him to repay her promise. She said that she had noticed that the lump had been gone for a few weeks, but just wanted to be sure it was gone. Today, she was paying St. Francis for healing her. She was a happy woman.

Because there is inadequate nutrition, especially during and after severe drought, children in the *sertão* are often weaned at a later age. These children, old enough to have a few teeth, often create inflammations to the breast while nursing. Continued nursing, poor hygiene, and other complications many times result in a lack of proper healing, which creates a lump that is feared as a symptom of breast cancer. Lack of governmental or municipal sanitation as well as lack of nutritional aid are revealed in the stories told by these ex-votos.

There is also a fairly large number of *ex-votos* that are offered depicting male genitalia. These *ex-votos* must have been surreptitiously deposited because they just seemed to appear. I never saw them being offered; however, I doubt that I would have had the nerve to inquire about the problem, even if I had. I did ask docents, among

others, their opinions about what condition these *ex-votos* might represent. All responded that it was syphilis, and as a rule negated my suggestion of impotency. I questioned a local doctor about the prevalence of venereal disease in the region. His response was that he had treated a few cases at the hospital but suspected there to be a higher number of incidents than was indicated by people seeking medical treatment. Brazil is a Roman Catholic country and contraceptives are not always available, especially in the rural areas. As a result, there is a high incidence of sexually transmitted disease, "shotgun" weddings, and illegitimate births.

Interestingly, in comparison with the several *milagres* depicting male genitalia, I only saw two *ex-votos* that graphically depicted female genitalia. There could be several explanations for this. Firstly, it could reveal a degree of female modesty. Apparently, it has only been in the recent past that many women offered *ex-votos* illustrating breast problems. It therefore stands to reason that depictions of female genitalia would be a sensitive issue. Secondly, this low number could be misleading, as female genitalia are contained more within the body. Because of this, *ex-votos* concerned with female fertility and/or venereal disease problems need not be so anatomically graphic as those deposited by men. Thirdly, symptomatic problems relating to sexually transmitted disease take much longer to manifest in females than in men, may often be misdiagnosed, and thus be represented differently in *ex-voto* form.

During my stay in Canindé, I saw none of the sort of preventive literature prevalent in the United States regarding venereal disease, pregnancy, or even AIDS. This leads me to think that the national and local governments, perhaps using the religious tenets of the Roman Catholic Church as an excuse, are doing nothing to educate people in rural areas about these health issues. The doctor with whom I spoke, proudly informed me that there had never been a case of AIDS in Canindé. This may be true, but I suggest that perhaps a case may have been present and been misdiagnosed, or the carrier has not looked to the

hospital for health care. While it is likely that intravenous drug use, a link to the spread of this virus, is low to non-existent in the rural Northeast, I also suggest that due to the unavailability of birth control, unprotected sex, another link to the spread of AIDS, is not uncommon. Additionally, in the Afro-Brazilian religion of Candomblé instances of AIDS are high due to the sharing of razors used in ritual bloodletting and the practice of homosexuality among its priests (Marilyn Nations: personal communication). For whatever reason, unless preventive measures are taken such as community education, it will not be long before AIDS is as problematic in this area as it is in others.

Another category of *ex-votos*, while not represented by large numbers, is indicative of poverty and governmental neglect. Handicaps due to polio and birth defects eradicated in most parts of the world are still in evidence in Northeastern Brazil. This is illustrated by the number of *milagres* depicting twisted limbs, the large number of crutches and leg braces left in the bins, and the handicapped pilgrims themselves. I did see government signs advertising free polio and tuberculosis inoculations while in Canindé, but because many people cannot read, the signs are overlooked. Also, there is a distrust of the government. Having been abused so many times by corrupt government representatives and being rather unfamiliar with medical procedures, many people do not take advantage of the free inoculations. Once again, the people are not being educated about the health risk, and as a result the governmental response is not a solution.

Lastly, one other medical condition that I saw illustrated frequently deals with improper umbilical healing. When the umbilical cord is cut at childbirth it must be kept clean and tightly bound to insure proper healing. High levels of sanitation are hard to achieve in areas where there is little clean water, where animals and humans share living quarters, and constant monitoring of children is impossible. As a result, it is not unusual to see toddlers with infected and herniated navels. In the six months I was in Canindé, I saw several children with this problem, four wooden *ex-votos* depicting this condition, at

least that many photographs on the walls of the House of Miracles showing children with navel problems, and one match box which contained a dried umbilical cord in the *ex-voto* bin.

The living conditions of the poor in the *sertão* are appalling, and disease loads carried by children are staggering. Inadequate nutrition has created a condition in which physical and mental growth is stunted; life expectancy is short, and education is thwarted. Because of lack of sufficient nutrients, many children are very small. Their attention span and their ability to think clearly have been affected. Rather than recognize their poor scholarship as a symptom of gross institutional discrimination and neglect, in most cases their performance is viewed as a form of inherited ignorance. In this way, the problem is turned away from the system and towards the individual, which results in a continuation of the problem. Unfortunately, rather than seeing this situation on the wane, due to the rising levels of inflation and the funneling of the majority of governmental funds to aid urban areas in Southern Brazil, this situation is rapidly growing.

Health care alternatives in Canindé

Brazil is nothing if not a heterogeneous culture. The blending of the three major ethnicities, the Portuguese, African, and Native American, can be seen, heard, and tasted in all facets of Brazilian culture. This includes health care. Located in Canindé is a regional medical center run by the Catholic Church and administered by the *Irmas do Santa Clara* (the order of the St. Clara sisterhood). There are seventeen attending physicians at this two hundred bed hospital, which must accommodate six states covering an area larger than the state of Texas. In Brazil, the government subsidizes the cost of indigent medical care. This means that everyone in Brazil can receive medical attention. Unfortunately, this also means that if you are poor, you may literally die in the waiting room before your number is called, while someone with more money is attended

immediately. Except for those who can afford it, prophylactic care is not routinely practiced in Brazil, and it seems that many people wait until health problems are grave before resorting to going to the hospital. Since Canindé is a rural location, crowded facilities are not so problematic as they are in urban areas. I interviewed Dr. Martins, a physician with the regional medical hospital for twenty-two years. He told me that health facilities have improved greatly during his tenure in Canindé, but that the general health of the population has not improved comparatively. He attributes this to a lack of health education and a lack of improvement in sanitation facilities. In 1970 only 2.5 percent of the rural households had running water and less than 0.5 percent were serviced by a sewer system. Seventy-five percent of all rural households had no sanitary facilities at all (Dias 1978: 176), and even though it has been over twenty years, the situation has not changed substantially. He said that most health problems are the result of extreme poverty. Because of poverty there is chronic malnutrition, which weakens the immune system. This, combined with unsanitary living conditions, creates a cycle of disease that eventually will wear down the body until it can fight no longer. He said that the most common diseases are parasitic infections, diarrhea leading to dehydration, and respiratory ailments like tuberculosis. He went on to say that even if there were one hundred doctors in Canindé, nothing would change until the government improves the sanitation facilities and people are educated about the necessity of clean water and living conditions. He said, as do most health care providers in third world countries, that he treats the same people over and over to rid them of parasites, but since there is no change in their living conditions, they are reinfected, which starts the cycle again. This results in the counterproductive situation of strengthening the strains of bacteria which attack the body and a weakening in the faith that a doctor can provide productive treatment.

Additionally, while medical treatment is free, medicines are not, and many times the cost makes their use prohibitive. Even if they are purchased, many times the full dosage is

not taken in hopes that this will make the medicine last longer. A weakened dosage is often not strong enough to combat the disease, resulting in the continuation of the health problem and in some cases fostering the development of antibiotic-resistant strains of bacteria. Again, instances such as these can lead to a lack of trust in hospitals and reinforce a mistrust of doctors. Brazilians do, however, have a strong belief in herbal remedies and utilize them far more than we do in the United States. To try to bridge the gap between the mistrust of medical doctors and their medicines, the regional hospital, in conjunction with the Federal University of Ceará, has created a *Farmácia Viva* (Living Pharmacy) adjacent to the hospital. Here, healing herbs that can be made into cough syrups, anti-inflammatory syrups, antiseptics, and light sedatives that give relief to simple health problems are grown and dispensed to those refusing or unable to purchase the medicines prescribed by the doctor (Barreto: personal papers).

For people who prefer treatments other than those given at the hospital, there are other alternatives available, such as given by *rezadeiras/os*, who heal through prayer and *curandeiras/os*, who heal through the use of herbs and magical practices. Both of these types of practitioners usually work in the impoverished *barros* and offer their services free or accept a barter exchange. During my time in Canindé I did not meet any *curandeiros/as,* but I was fortunate to meet Maria dos Anjos, a *rezadeira* living in *Barro dos Montes*. This woman, though partially blind, has, like her grandmother before her, the ability to see what normal vision cannot. Through touch Maria can discern if you have *bem* (good) or *mau* (bad) *energias*. She can tell if there is a bad spirit weighing you down and, with a beatific smile, place her hands on either side of your face or upon the infirmed spot, and pray for healing. When she placed her hands on my face, I felt her energy vibrating against my skin. It was a remarkable sensation, and though I had not been feeling ill, I felt euphoric when I left her house. I can see why people have turned to her for healing for over fifty years.

In addition to the prayers of a *rezadeira*, other forms of religious healing are widespread through Brazil. Evidence of pluralistic religious healing attitudes can be found even in this major Roman Catholic shrine town. In addition to those who are faithful to St. Francis, there is at least one active *Espiritismo* (Spiritism) group and at least three Umbanda *terreiros* (temples) in Canindé. A recent study undertaken by the *Conferência Nacional dos Bispos do Brasil* (CNBB) found that at least twenty percent of the Catholic population regularly participates in one of these or a similar practice such as Candomblé or Macumba (*Gazeta do Sertão*: 1996). In both of these religions (or cults as they are called in Brazil), trance-like states are achieved by practitioners, in which healing information particular to the patient is channeled to them by a spiritual entity. Treatments are often in the form of *limpas* (ritual cleansings) and, in the case of Umbanda, offerings to one of the pantheon of deities determined most helpful in ameliorating the divined problem.

I could never find anyone to speak with me at length about the alternative religious groups in Canindé. Some people said they did not exist in Canindé; others said that they were a small group of people that practiced black magic. It was not until I found a 1996 newspaper article from the *Gazeta do Sertão* that I definitively learned about alternative religious practices in Canindé. The fact that I was living at the monastery may have inhibited my opportunity to gather information about these groups. I did, however, have a chance to visit an Umbanda ceremony while visiting in Fortaleza. The *terreiro* was in a quiet neighborhood of lower middle class houses. There was no indication that this house was any different from the similar houses which lined the street and certainly nothing to distinguish it as one of the most popular *terreiros* in Fortaleza. I was visiting that night's meeting with a Brazilian friend, by invitation of one of the *terreiro* members. As we walked up the sidewalk, I heard many people talking in the courtyard waiting to enter the altar room where the trances and dancing take place. Because Umbanda combines African possession religion with Catholicism, the trances and dancing took place before an altar

upon which several statues, familiar to me as Christian personages, were sitting. When we walked into the altar room, I noticed that people were bowing in front of the statues when they passed, similar to genuflection in front of the crucifix behind the altars in Roman Catholic churches. On the altar of the *terreiro* I remember a statue of the Virgin Mary, which is sometimes used in Umbanda to depict *Iemanjá* the female spirit of the sea; one of Jesus, who often represents *Oxalá* male spirit of the sky; and one of St. Barbara, who often represents *Yansâ* the female spirit of wind and storms. There were many candles and bowls of food also placed on the altar for these *orixás,* spirits. There were two large chairs sitting in front of the altar for the *mãe de santo* and *pai de santo*, spiritual leaders of the *terreiro.* There were bleachers along one wall where people could watch the proceedings. Presently, people started coming in for the ceremony. First, the leaders entered followed by the novices, women dressed all in white. After some initial remarks by the *pai* welcoming the people and encouraging the visitation of the *espíritos*, the two drummers slowly started playing their *atabaques* to summon the spirits. The novices lined the floor in two rows and swayed with the beat of the drums, increasing their movements as the beats became more rapid until they were spinning around, arms extended, skirts swirling, and beads flying. Sooner than one would think possible, the trances began. As one woman would swoon, those around her would catch her as if on cue. Having read about Afro-Brazilian religions before visiting, I recognized manifestations of *Pretos Velhos* ("Old Blacks") and *Caboclos* (unacculturated Brazilian Indians) possessing the novices. There was one women who was dressed differently from all the others. She had on a long deep red velvet dress. When she went into trance she had two women assisting just her, and she alone wore a man's fedora and smoked a big cigar. I was having a wonderful time. I did not feel like an outsider, but felt completely at peace. Before I knew what had happened, the woman in red was standing in front of me and speaking to me. She was in trance and speaking a dialect that I could not understand. I told her that I

could not understand what she was saying, to which she threw back her head and laughed heartily. She grabbed me and hugged me, lifting me off the ground. While she had me in her arms, I felt something flowing into my solar plexus from her. When she put me down, I felt changed and that feeling has never left me. Unfortunately, I never got another chance to visit an Umbanda ceremony again, but the powerful feelings the first trip evoked return each time I remember it.

At the same time that the novices were going into trance, the *pai de santo* was also receiving the *espíritos* into his body. People in the audience formed a line in front of him. As their turn came to speak with the *pai* he would listen to their problem and then lay his hands upon them, spray them with some sort of fluid which he took into his mouth, or talk to them in the voice of the *espírito* who wanted to involve her/himself in that individual's problem.

One of the things which draws people to a *terreiro* is the sense of community. Much in the same way that the *freis* in Canindé will find food, lodging, and clothing for a person, the *mãe* and *pai* of a *terreiro* do the same. In the *sertão*, where most things are unsure, some people must feel that following both St. Francis and the *espíritos* is not disloyal, but simply doubling their options.

B. *Ex-votos* acting as links in the spiritual chain

Periodically, a pilgrim will pay his *promessa* by walking to Canindé carrying a cross. When this happens, these pilgrims are attributed celebrity status. One such pilgrim arrived in Canindé on June 8, 1996, after much anticipation by the townspeople. He had begun his pilgrimage about fifteen months ago in the state of Sergipe (Figure 6) and had received quite a lot of press coverage during the length of his journey. He was called "*Homen de Crux*" (Man of the Cross) by the pilgrim population and had achieved almost legendary

folk hero status as stories about him spread through the region. His cross was placed in the House of Miracles after his arrival and was treated as a holy relic. When the cross arrived in Canindé it was covered with photographs and small *ex-votos* that people along his route had attached to it. After it was brought into the House of Miracles, people would lay prostrate before it, touch it, and tie *fitas* and locks of hair to it as if through sympathetic magic, they would be imbued with his grace. Though his cross had been made a bit more mobile by the addition of wheels, it was so heavy that I could not even lift it to my shoulder. He had carried the cross for so long that there was a worn, indented place in the wood where his shoulder had been. Frei Humberto interviewed Luiz José Vieira do Bonfim, the *Homen de Crux*. This is a translation of his story.

> I was born nearly blind, deaf, mute, and paralyzed. After ten years I received a gift from the family of a child that died in a bus accident. The family gave me her eyes. My mother made a *promessa* with St. Lúcia, and from that day, I could see better. At eleven years of age, on September 4, 1977, at the Festival for *Padroeira de Aquidabám*, in Sergipe, a wagon loaded with dried meat had bad breaks and killed seventeen people. It crashed into our house causing the roof to fall down. Part of the roof fell on me and crushed my leg. I was in the hospital for nine months, and my mother was afraid I would die. My mother had hope in St. Francis of Wounds and over the course of two years and six days made one hundred and nineteen *promessas* with him to make me well. The payment of the promise would not be valid unless I walked to Canindé on foot. I hope I have another chance to walk

here again.

The cross of the *Homen de Cnux* eventually was taken to the local museum where it joined five crosses, which had been collected from previous pilgrims who had walked from the Northeastern states of Alagoas, Paraíba, Pernambuco (2), and Piauí. Just like the new one, each of these crosses is completely covered with names, cuttings of hair, small wooden anatomical *ex-votos*, and photographs, among other items, which are applied to the cross by people all along the route traveled by the pilgrim to Canindé. As the pilgrim travels through the countryside, people turn out to see him, much as people did in the United States with the passing of the Olympic Torch. As the pilgrim travels, his cross becomes emblematic of the regional faith in St. Francis. As the cross passes through the countryside and is laden with more and more offerings, it is transformed from the symbol of one man's devotion into one representing the devotion of the whole Northeast. As this cross is carried across the country, people become directly linked with other pilgrims, creating a spiritual chain that reaches all the way to the shrine at Canindé. Since these types of pilgrimages often occur after a terrific drought, a time of devastation shared by everyone, they serve as a revitalization agent for the entire region. These pilgrimages enable even those who cannot make the pilgrimage themselves to pay their *promessas* by proxy. The crosses in the museum can literally be read as lasting "metasocial commentaries" as mentioned by Geertz (1973: 448), because they chronicle the miracles shared by the "forgotten" people of the Northeast through time and space.

C. *Ex-votos* reinforcing community and social reciprocity

> The decision to go on pilgrimage takes place within the individual but brings him into fellowship with like-minded souls, both on the way and at the shrine. The social dimension is generated by the

> individual's choice, multiplied many times. On pilgrimage, social interaction is not governed by the old rules of social structure (Turner 1978:31).

The majority of pilgrims traveling to Canindé come as a group. The group may be marked by homogeneity, family or neighbors that began the trip together, or it may be a diverse group that because of "communitas" (Turner 1978) experience cohesion along the way. The most common means of group transportation to Canindé is by *pau de arara* (Figure 7). *Pau de arara* translates as parrot perch and is the name given to the open-trailered lorries that are converted into people carriers. They are so-called because the bench seats made of logs that fill the lorries, resemble parrot perches. Blocks of these seats can be reserved in advance for a family or neighbor group, and the lorry makes stops all along the route until it is filled. As the travelers often come great distances to reach Canindé, the trip may take several days. During this time the pilgrims, all "like-minded," and in many instances similarly dressed in the brown pilgrimage uniform, form bonds. By the time they reach Canindé they have become fictive kin, relations united in the family of St. Francis and belonging to the community of that particular *pau de arara*. During their stay in Canindé they are part of a formal group, complete with the benefits and obligations comparable to kin groups throughout the world. Most pilgrims who come to Canindé, especially during the *Romaria*, stay at the church-owned *abrigos*. The *abrigos* are a series of shelters complete with communal bath and cooking facilities located a short distance from the center of the city. The *abrigos* become like small communities built around the occupants of a bus or *pau de arara*. Each shelter is filled with the hammocks of the group. The women cook communally and take turns watching each other's children while their men swap stories and perhaps share a bottle of *cachaça*. When they visit the Basilica they will visit as a group. The festival is almost like a national conference which is made

up of small regional delegations, each having its own focus, but sharing an allegiance which binds everyone together.

Another example of the sense of community encouraged by the *ex-voto* tradition can be seen in reciprocal arrangements made between pilgrims who travel to Canindé and their family members and neighbors who remain at home. It is not uncommon for a pilgrim to deposit several *milagres* at one time. Sometimes all of the *milagres* are made by one person in the community, but they can also represent the work of different individuals. As I questioned pilgrims with multiple *ex-votos*, I learned that they were depositing *ex-votos* for friends and family that did not make the trip to Canindé. I learned that often families and friends would pool their finances to have enough money to send one or two representatives of their group to Canindé. This representative would deposit their *ex-votos* and perhaps buy them a religious souvenir to be blessed by a priest. Many times people fill empty plastic liter bottles with water from the grotto, bring it to a priest to be blessed, and then take it back to their community to enable those who remained behind to physically share in the sacred experience of the pilgrimage.

In return for these activities, people remaining behind perform services for those who traveled. Most people living in this region live on small *sitios*, farms which require continuous maintenance. Their daily chores, such as the feeding of animals, are temporarily taken over by those people staying at home. In addition, these people may volunteer to watch the small children, or the elderly, or infirm family members of those making the trip to Canindé. Through reciprocal activities such as these, whole groups work together to accomplish the actual pilgrimage attendance of only a few. But, even if only vicariously, all are enabled to share the experience and pay their promises to St. Francis.

D. *Ex-votos* in oral folk narratives

In cultures where there are high rates of illiteracy, such as is found in the Northeast of Brazil, storytelling and the oral narrative are cohesive agents that connect people through space and time. A bulk of oral information dealing with "miracle stories" is shared by pilgrims coming to Canindé from all over this vast region (Slater 1986). This shared knowledge crosses generational boundaries and acts as information for membership into the community of St. Francis. While these stories are based upon factual events, over time they are transformed into stories of mythic proportions which glorify the healing power of St. Francis and reinforce the benefit of being counted as one of his followers. They are, to paraphrase Geertz's words, stories they tell themselves about themselves.

I first learned of the legendary miracle stories surrounding St. Francis of Wounds through talking with the pilgrims. These stories were related to me quite sincerely, but their fantastic quality made me interested in hearing these same stories told by someone outside the pilgrim culture. For other narrations, I turned to Dr. Barreto and the *freis*, and from them learned a similar but less fantastic version of these mythic tales. These different versions reinforce Geertz's idea that culture is interpreted and also Sider's theory that culture is interpreted differently depending upon one's place in the cultural "web."

Throughout the rest of this chapter, I will share some of the stories that I heard from the pilgrims, as well as stories told to me by residents of Canindé, Dr. Barreto, and the *freis*. These stories take various forms, ranging from miracle stories, creation myths, and apocalyptic stories, to what could be described as urban or occupational legends. Some of the stories instruct, some are metaphors for social situations, and some simply validate people's faith in St. Francis. Many of these stories have been repeated for generations. This is a revealing testament to this active tradition. However, one story is new and revolves around an *ex-voto* that was brought to the House of Miracles in my presence. The *ex-voto* immediately received a lot of attention, and by the next day, word of it had

spread throughout the community. For the next several days people came to the House of Miracles just to see this *milagre* and to recount the story behind it. It was interesting to watch this dynamic process in action as it became obvious that with this new *ex-voto*, a new legend had been added to the oral literature surrounding the miracles of St. Francis. This story, "*Criança con Cruzeiro*" is related later in this chapter.

The Miracle story of the founding and building of *O Santuário de São Francisco das Chagas*

It is interesting that even though people in Canindé refuse to accept that St. Francis of Wounds and St. Francis of Assisi are one and the same, Francisco de Assisi is one of the most common names given to boys in the area. This story was first told to me by DeAssis, a young man about twenty years old, who is studying to be a Franciscan brother and works in the House of Miracles. I later heard pieces of this story from others. The story is as follows:

> Many many years ago, before the shrine to St. Francis was built, three brothers owned all of the land where Canindé is now. They were evil men who mistreated the people who worked their land for them. The Roman Catholic fathers wanted to build a mission here, but the brothers refused to sell their land. However, through a miracle the land was given to the church. It seems that one by one the brothers experienced misfortune and death, until the remaining brother, in fear for his life, gave the land to the church. These miracles continued during the erection of the first cathedral, which has since been replaced by the present day Basilica. It

> seems that during the building of the first cathedral, several miracles also occurred. The most notable one was when one of the carpenters, working high upon one of the steeples, lost his footing. As he was falling, presumably to his death, he screamed, 'Save me, St. Francis'. At this exact time, his belt was caught by another piece of scaffolding breaking his fall and saving his life.

When I read the history of the shrine in the volume *São Francisco das Chagas de Canindé, Resumo Histórico* written in 1962 by Frei Venâncio Willeke, this "mysterious" legend was alluded to, but not confirmed or denied. It did verify that in 1758, two Franciscan brothers left the monastery in Recife, to begin a "*culto*," a following, of St. Francis of Wounds, in the area of Canindé (Willeke 1962: 27). It seems that St. Francis has always been associated in Roman Catholic literature with thaumaturgy, the performance of miracles, and to honor this many of the Franciscan brothers in Canindé wear wooden T's around their necks. This writing of the history of Canindé states that it is through religious instruction connected with the doctrine of St. Francis de Assisi, who is often referred to in canonical writings as St. Francis of Wounds because of his having received the stigmata, that miracles became connected with the shrine. In other words, the "official story" of the church is that religious canons dictated the shrine's association with miracles, while the "unofficial story" of the people maintains that St. Francis himself began the association by performing miraculous events. This is yet another illustration of the struggle for cultural ownership and the anticlerical philosophy of the people of the Northeast, whereby their belief is connected directly to their patron saint rather than linked through an intermediary of the church.

***A Meninha das Amazonas* (The Little Girl from *Amazonas*)**

The next miracle story is the most famous of the legends associated with the shrine. It was first told to me by Maria Édite on my first trip to the museum, but I was repeatedly told it by other people as well. Frequently pilgrims asked me where the "***meninha***" could be found. This is a translation of the story.

> Many years ago in the state of Amazonas, Maria Aperecida, a little four year old girl, was picnicking in the jungle with her family. While her parents were not looking the little girl wandered off, disappearing into the jungle. Her parents shouted and shouted, and looked and looked, but the little girl was not found. The parents looked for several days. They feared that a wild animal had taken their little girl, and that they would never see her again, especially not alive. In desperation, they appealed to St. Francis to find their daughter for them. They promised to make the long journey to his shrine in Canindé if he would please do this. The very next day, the little girl walked into her parent's village, apparently no worse for wear, after spending several days in the jungle. Her parents were overjoyed and asked how she survived in the jungle all by herself. She told them that she had not been by herself, but that a kindly old man had taken care of her. The mother and father went into the jungle to try to find this old man, to thank him for saving their daughter's life, but he was never found. Soon, to repay St. Francis as they promised, the family made the pilgrimage to the shrine at Canindé. They brought with them a life-size

doll dressed in clothing of the little girl to deposit in the House of Miracles. When they entered the Basilica they knelt under the painting of St. Francis. The little girl looked up and said to her parents, 'That is the old man that took care of me in the jungle.' And so it was that it was St. Francis who took care of the little girl, proving to all that he is always willing to help those who believe in him.

This plastic doll, about three feet tall, is prominently displayed in the shrine museum in Canindé. However, the blonde haired doll appears to be dressed in the polyester clothes in which she originally came from the factory rather than those of a little girl. After at least thirty years in the museum, she is looking pretty tired and dusty. She is, however, the biggest draw that the museum has, beating out tribal artifacts brought back from the Amazon, taxidermy, pistols from the famous bandit Lampião, and mineral specimens from Minas Geras. She is so famous that when someone asks, "Where is the *meninha*?" everyone expects you to understand what they mean. It would seem that this doll is no longer merely a doll; she is an icon, the permanent manifestation of a miracle. Seeing her is, to contemporary pilgrims, similar to what viewing the relics of saints during the Middle Ages was to medieval pilgrims.

The Man Who Rose From the Dead

This third narrative is another famous miracle story that has been transformed into legend. Again, this story was first told to me by Maria Édite, but was repeated to me by several others. This story, along with the "creation myth" of the shrine and the tale of the *meninha* comprise the nucleus of the shared legends surrounding the shrine. The true facts of this story were told to me by Dr. Barreto, who was in the House of Miracles when

the event occurred and captured it on film. I will first relate the miracle story as told to me by Maria Édite.

> Many, many years ago there was a very devout man. He was very, very sick and the doctors could not diagnose what was the matter with him. He appealed to St. Francis to help him and promised to make a pilgrimage when he was well. He did get a bit better, but he was too weak, and died before St. Francis could heal him. Before he died, he asked that he be taken to Canindé in his casket to pay his promise to St. Francis. He was a very religious and good man and wanted to pay his promise even after his death. When his family brought him to the shrine at Canindé, and set his casket before the statue of St. Francis, they heard knocking coming from within the casket. They removed the casket lid, and the dead man sat up — alive. St. Francis had been so moved by the faith of the man that he decided to bring him back from the dead. The man and his family walked away from the shrine, leaving his casket as an *ex-voto*.

Several times, I heard pilgrims ask where they could view this casket. However, it was destroyed along with other *ex-votos* brought to the shrine that year by the annual burning occurring at the end of each year's pilgrimage season.

Dr. Barreto, who in addition to being an anthropologist is a practicing psychiatrist, supplied the background of the story. While it is true that the man came to Canindé in his casket, he was not dead. However, no one knew this but Dr. Barreto, a *frei*, and the man

and his family. The events of the story unfolded in this way: Dr. Barreto received a telephone call from a *frei* who was disturbed by a letter he had received from this man. In the letter, the man told the priest that he had been told by St. Francis himself that in order to be healed of the emotional problems that he was having, he must come to Canindé in a sealed coffin. And, once he arrived in Canindé the coffin could only be opened by a priest. The priest, wanting to help the man, but unsure how to deal with such a bizarre request, turned to Dr. Barreto for his professional opinion. Dr. Barreto spoke with this man and discovered that his problems stemmed from a childhood incident. As a child the man had gone to church with his mother. She had told him to go to confession, but he had not. When it can time to go to receive Communion from the priest, the boy was afraid to tell his mother that he had not gone to confession. He knew from religious teaching that it was a sin to take Communion if one had not been to confession, so when the host was laid upon his tongue, he spit it out. Horrified by this act, and learning of his lie about going to communion, the boy's mother told him he was doubly damned. Apparently, the man was truly traumatized by this, because as he grew older, he began to have psychological problems relating to this incident and even had tried suicide. In desperation, he appealed to St. Francis for forgiveness, who then told him that he must go to Canindé in a casket and have it opened by a priest. Then, St. Francis said, he would have forgiveness. Dr. Barreto thought that this request was very profound, as it was the perfect metaphor for the man's emotional problems. His spiritual death had occurred when he spit out the host. As a result, his resurrection could only be accomplished by forgiveness by the church, the authority that damned him. Dr. Barreto encouraged the *frei* to cooperate and suggested that tiny airholes be bored into the lid of the casket to ensure that suffocation would not occur. The man was brought to the House of Miracles in his casket, which was then opened by the priest. To all effects, it appeared to onlookers that a dead man was brought to life, and it created quite a stir. To this day, no one knows that this was a staged

"miracle," and the resurrection story is repeated to each new generation of pilgrims. It is truly a wonderful story of the redemptive qualities of faith, and I doubt that even if people were told the truth, that they would believe it.

A Criança con Cruzeiro (The Child with the Coin)

A Criança con Cruzeiro story spread throughout the pilgrim community within a few hours during the 1996 *Romaria* in honor of St. Francis. This annual festival, beginning on October 4, the birth date of St. Francis of Assisi, lasts about ten days and is the high point of the pilgrimage season. During this time period, the population of Canindé, normally about 25,000, swells to about 350,000. The shrine is literally packed with people, and the town is transformed into a human camp. City streets are closed off, and hammocks are tied to anything vertical, be that a tree, a lamp post, or a gate. Small cooking fires heat water for coffee, while bathing, sleeping, eating, and other affairs of living become public spectacles.

During the Festival, the House of Miracles is continually a swarming mass of bodies, pushing and shoving to get to the bin in order to view the *milagres*. It was into this mass of people that a man appeared one afternoon with a crudely made *ex-voto* representing his daughter. The *milagre* immediately attracted attention because it was very grotesque. It was about two feet tall and crudely hewn from wood. What made it so grotesque was the fact that it was dressed in a baby's diaper, it had a Brazilian coin in its mouth, and its head was covered with human hair. Fellow pilgrims surrounded the man after he had deposited the offering and demanded to hear of the miracle it represented. The man, a local resident, was more than willing to repeat the story over and over to all who wanted to hear it. This is what he said.

> Earlier that day I had been at home, taking a break from
> the festivities, when I saw out of the corner of my eye,

> Tonia, my little girl, a toddler, put something into her mouth. Before I could grab her and see what was in her mouth, she swallowed it and begin to choke. I turned her upside down and smacked her on the back, but whatever it was was lodged in her throat. I could see that she could not breathe and that she was beginning to turn blue. I did everything I could to dislodge the object, finally my little girl stopped moving and I feared that she had died. I screamed, *'Não, não, São Francisco, ajuda me'* (No, no, St. Francis, help me). At that exact moment, my little girl coughed and the object, a coin, was magically expelled from her throat. Within a few minutes she was back to crawling around and playing as if nothing had happened.

The father, overcome with gratitude to St. Francis for saving the life of his daughter, decided to immediately make an *ex-voto* for payment. He found the wood and measured the height of his daughter. He then took the clothes that she was wearing and dressed the *ex-voto* in them. When he was carving the facial features, he opened the mouth enough to wedge the same coin she had swallowed into the opening. Finally, he cut the curls of hair from the head of his child and glued them onto the *milagre*, making it as representative as possible. The father, still visibly shaken by the recounting of the events, and so full of gratitude towards St. Francis for coming to the rescue, made a compelling storyteller. This, in combination with the uniqueness of the votive offering, resulted in a sort of instant celebrity status for the *ex-voto*. For the rest of the Festival, crowds of people pushed to examine and discuss the "*Criança con Cruzeiro.*" Because of its notoriety, this *ex-voto* was removed from the bin to be placed in the museum. I am sure that in years to come,

the *Criança*, like the *Meninha*, will be a popular attraction for pilgrims coming to the shrine in Canindé.

***Santa Lúcia* and how she lost her eyes**

Ex-votos can also represent stories from religious history. These *ex-votos* are often taken from the bin by a parent and held while they recount to their children the story "told" by the offering. In this way, the *milagres* can function as aids to religious instruction and the generation of sacred mythology. One such story is of St. Lucy, acknowledged in books of hagiography as the patron saint of vision. This the story as it was told to me.

> Lucy, the beautiful daughter of a very wealthy king who lived back in the times of Jesus, refused to marry a suitor because he was not a Christian. He was a very bad man, and became very angry that Lucy would not marry him. In a jealous rage, he plucked out her eyes and served them to her on a plate, saying that if she would not marry him, that she would never look on another man again. God, to reward Lucy's devotion to him, brought her to heaven. From there she looks down on all Christian people, and it is to her we pray when we have a problem with eyesight.

Ex-votos that represent the story of St. Lúcia are quite interesting. Usually they are depicted as eyeballs on a plate. Not knowing the story of St. Lúcia before coming to Canindé, when I saw the first one, I was quite shocked. The docent at the House of Miracles was very amused at my reaction to the *milagre* and then told me the story of the

saint. Thereafter, when someone deposited another example of this religious story, I was always made aware of its presence.

The Apocalypse of Canindé

This story was told to me by Dr. Barreto and concerns the political situation in Canindé resulting from hostility between the sacred authority of the Church and the secular authority of local politicians. In the town of Canindé practically all the property is owned by the Roman Catholic Church. Because of this, there is an ongoing animosity between the local government and the Church. The local government, backed by several local businessmen, argue that the Church restricts any sort of progressive growth in Canindé. Businessmen see the shrine as a lucrative business opportunity going to waste and want to capitalize on it through the building of hotels and restaurants. Presently, there are only two or three small hotels in Canindé. The local government argues that Canindé could attract many visitors (and their revenue) from Europe and North America if there were facilities to accommodate them. The Church is against this and has prevented the passing of referenda which would allow growth of this type. The Church's stance has angered local politicians to the point that they now are trying to force their platforms through by paying for votes. One way this is accomplished is by sending *pau de araras* out into the countryside to give people rides into Canindé to pay their *promessas* in exchange for their votes.

The Church wants Canindé to remain focused on religion, presumably the religion of the poor marginalized inhabitants of the Northeast who consider a pilgrimage to the shrine at Canindé tantamount to a pilgrimage to Mecca by the Muslims. In any case, this animosity has created an air of tension among the inhabitants of Canindé. Dr. Barreto feels that the following story that has spread through the community concerning the destruction of the shrine illustrates this tension.

Before launching into the story, some background information must be given. Recently, a different priest has taken over the duties of coordinating public involvement in the Festival. This priest is strongly against the mixing of politics and religion and has refused to cooperate in anything that is suspected of having political motivation. The new priest has effectively taken the Festival out of the hands of prominent residents with political ties and given it to the poor. No longer does the statue of St. Francis ride on the shoulders of local politicians during the parade from the Basilica through the town. It now rides on the shoulders of respected men selected from each *barro*. No longer are the nightly *novenas* used as political platforms. Instead, youth or neighborhood groups perform skits depicting an event in the life of St. Francis or illustrating a contemporary social problem. The Festival is now focused on the devoted, and there are some who are not happy about it. The following is the story:

> Jetulio, an old man who doubles as the bell-ringer at the Basilica and as caretaker at the local cemetery, began having visitations from what he called the "souls of the dead." These souls told him that a big wind was coming that would destroy Canindé and only those people who were in the Basilica when the winds came would be saved. He began to tell this warning to all who would listen.

People became concerned, as Jetulio does have contact with the dead through his work at the cemetery. The story was quickly squelched by the *freis*, who told him not to talk about it anymore. But it is not forgotten. I asked several local residents about it, and they all knew of the warnings, blamed it upon the tension between the church and state, and felt caught in the middle.

Did you hear the one about the man who came by bus instead?

Living with the *freis* afforded me the privilege of having a window into monastic life. In many ways it was the tranquil ascetic life that I imagined. In many other ways it was not. One characteristic that I had not expected to find was the sense of merriment and ensuing abundance of levity that was shared by the brotherhood. Meal time, especially lunch, which was the only meal formally taken together, was the occasion when the *freis* discussed events of the day, shared memories, and told jokes. It was amusing to hear these jokes even though I usually never understood the humor in them. They were amusing to me, especially as an anthropologist, because of the type of jokes they were. Essentially they were ethnocentric ridicule similar to a "polack" joke. The difference is that instead of ridicule being directed towards a ethnic group, the derision was directed towards the Jesuits. In the hierarchical standing of Roman Catholic monastic orders, the Jesuits are considered rather elitist. Coming from scholarly backgrounds, this order, among other duties, usually takes a leading role in religious politics, and its members are often professors in ecumenical universities around the world. On the other hand, the Franciscans, a mendicant order, take vows of poverty, minister to the poor, and are considered at the lower end of the pecking order. It is interesting that this type of role reversal and reverse discrimination is demonstrated in the humor of the Franciscan priests. I found it very reassuring and almost endearing that even though these men have renounced many secular things for their faith, they still retain a bit of the devil within.

Another example of their monastic humor can be found in the telling of what I consider the equivalent of an urban legend. I deem it an urban legend in that it may or may not have occurred and has been repeated so often that it has now become an amusing anecdote. But, because of the content and the audience to which it is repeated, I suggest that it also falls into the category of occupational legend. This particular story was told to me at lunch by one of the priests. It concerned a confession that he had heard that

morning. I was a bit suspicious of the validity of the story at the time because I knew that the *freis* normally do not discuss things told to them in confession. My suspicions were confirmed when I noticed the twinkle in his eyes and the muffled laughter going around the table. This is the story I was told.

> A man came into confession today from Maranhão. As you know that is very far from Canindé. Anyway, he had made a *promessa* to St. Francis to come to Canindé on foot. Later, he realized that it was a long way, that it would take a very long time to reach Canindé on foot and he would miss many days of work. So, instead of walking, he decided to come here on the bus. As a compromise, he stood in the aisle of the bus the whole way. He was very worried that St. Francis would think he had reneged on his promise and asked my opinion. I told him it was okay. I thought St. Francis would understand.

Afterwards, when I told him that I did not believe him, he and the rest of the priests roared with laughter, not just at me but at the story itself. It would seem that this type of humor can be found within any occupational group, even priests.

Stories using St. Francis as an agent of enculturation

While I was in the House of Miracles one day, a woman came up to me and asked where she could find the *homen grávida* (pregnant man). Once again I thought that it was a situation where I just could not understand her Portuguese and asked her to repeat herself. She asked again where she could find the pregnant man. I'm sure that I looked at her as if she were crazy, because she said something else that I could not understand

(which was probably a good thing) and walked off to find someone who could answer her question. After she left, I also went to find someone who could answer her question. I was told who the pregnant man was and was interested to find out that there are a number of legends attributed to St. Francis in which he teaches a lesson to people who don't believe in him. The *Homen Grávida* is the most widely known of this type of legend, and in a pattern similar to an urban legend, many people believe that it occurred recently and that the man can be found locally. The legend was told to me as follows:

> There was a man who came to Canindé who did not believe in the miraculous powers of *São Francisco das Chagas*. Even though people told him of the miracles that St. Francis had worked for them, he was still a doubter. He bragged that he did not believe and said, "If St. Francis can work miracles then he can make me a pregnant man." The man began to swell immediately, causing quite a commotion. This swelling continued for several days until the man said he believed and asked St. Francis to help him. The man soon returned to his normal size.

I heard two endings to this story. One is that he returned from where he came, but comes to Canindé each year for the *Romaria*. The other says that he moved to Canindé and remains one of St. Francis' most devout followers.

I questioned Dr. Barreto about the story, and he said that perhaps the story is based on a bit of truth. It is possible that a man suffering from a disease which caused his body to swell did come to the shrine. Someone saw him and said that he looked pregnant. Then someone else overheard and misunderstood, thinking that the person said the man

was pregnant. Then, as legends are often built upon rumor, as the story was told and retold, the legend was created.

When I asked if there were any more stories similar to this, I was told one about a little boy who stuck out his tongue so often that he could not get it back in his mouth. Apparently, he was an ill-tempered boy whose mother told him that if he did not stop sticking his tongue out at her, she would ask St. Francis to make it stay that way. The warnings did not deter him, and so St. Francis made the boy's tongue remain sticking out.

I do not think there is any basis of truth in this story; however, it is quite interesting to me that St. Francis can be added to the list of fictive agents of enculturation.

Chapter 4

THE *EX-VOTOS*: AESTHETICS AND FORMS

The history of pilgrimage and the material culture that accompanies this ritual has changed little since it was first chronicled. As I read historical accounts of the tradition, I was struck by the similarity of the descriptions to contemporary types of offerings I saw in Canindé. One writer discussing votive offerings of the Middle Ages divides the myriad of offerings into four major categories: animate, inanimate, exuvial, and replicative (Finucane 1977: 96). It is quite apparent that, despite the four hundred years that have passed since the height of Christian pilgrimage, these categories are still applicable. During the Middle Ages, animate offerings were usually in the form of pilgrimage and animal sacrifice. While sacrificing animals has virtually disappeared, pilgrimages still occur all over the world and contemporary animate offerings include the donation of living animals. Inanimate offerings historically and now usually take the form of crutches that are no longer needed, or another item that had a utilitarian life before becoming inherently connected to a miracle. Exuvial offerings in the past and presently can still be rather macabre. This type of offering could consist of a bit of hair, a gall stone, or something else cast off from the body. Unchanged from medieval times, the replicative offering is the most common type of offering. Into this category fall the anatomical *ex-votos* found in different forms and made from different materials and offered to several deities all over the world.

A. Otra modas/other ways of paying the promise

Before launching into the main focus of my research, which concerns the replicative hand-crafted *milagres*, I will inventory the many other ways that I witnessed *promessas* being repaid. These payments took the form of candles, objects from nature, utilitarian

objects, exuvial fluids and materials, wearing the *batina* (pilgrim's costume), walking the "Stations of the Cross," mortification of the flesh, walking to Canindé, photographs, fireworks, tithes, and recycled objects (Figure 8).

Candles

Since around the fourth century the Church has accepted the "pagan custom" of offering candles at shrines. Candles were thought of as pagan because their tradition involved sympathetic magic and transference. This tradition continues at Canindé. Many times an object or a person or body part is measured, and a candle is purchased that reflects this measurement. It is believed that an illness can be transferred into the candle and destroyed as the candle burns (Finucane:1977: 96). Candles of odd lengths are more costly, and can only be purchased by special order from a candle factory in Fortaleza or another commercial center. Because Canindé is located a great distance from any commercial center, this tradition is not as active here as it is in urban shrines. I saw examples of this on only two occasions and both times the candles were intended to represent the length of the pilgrim's arm. I saw these two instances because the pilgrims carried the candles into the House of Miracles looking for a place to burn them. Behind the Basilica in the park is a special grotto where candles are burned. It may be that there were other instances where these unusual candles were brought and were taken directly to the grotto, but I never saw them.

The simplest way to repay a *promessa* with candles is by purchasing regular tapers. Twelve inch taper candles can be purchased for around seventy-five cents apiece in one of the many souvenir shops surrounding the Basilica. On a few occasions candles were left wrapped in the paper from the store and placed in the bin at the House of Miracles rather than taken to the grotto to be burned. When this happened, I noticed that one of the

docents waited until the pilgrim had left the building, removed the candles from the bin before they were broken, and took them to use in her home.

Objects from nature

Even though Canindé is only about three hours from the sea, many people living in the interior have never ventured to the coast. Once when a large conch-type shell was left in the bin, Maria, one of the docents who is about fifty years old, admired it. I held it to my ear, as I have done all my life, to hear the waves of the ocean. She asked what I was doing, and I said that I was listening to the ocean and told her to hold it to her ear. As she did, her face became transfigured with amazement. She had never heard the real ocean before and now magically she could listen to it whenever she wished. For the rest of the day, I would see her pick up the shell, hold it to her ear, and smile.

Another type of natural object that is deposited in the votive bins is pieces of wood that have unusual formations, such as a forked branch that resembles a human form or two branches which have fused to resemble a cross. These natural formations are considered very powerful and if not used as an offering are given prominence on a wall in the home, usually above the home altar. An entire wall in the museum is covered with these natural cross formations that have been offered to St. Francis over the years.

Steer horns are also offered to St. Francis. While the *sertão* is too dry to support large scale agriculture, it does support many cattle ranches. There is even a special Mass given for the *vaqueiros* (cowboys) during the Festival of St. Francis. At this time, hats and chaps worn by the *vaqueiros*, as well as cattle horns, are deposited, and for a few days the House of Miracles smells like a stable.

Another interesting way of paying a promise related to cattle is by playing a bingo game. About once a month, to fulfill a *promessa*, one of the owners of the big cattle ranches would donate one of his animals to the parish. The parish house would then have

a bingo game with the grand prize being the steer. The winner could either take the animal or sell it at the livestock market. I also noted one month that the grand prize was a donkey, a prized work animal in this part of Brazil. The bingo card is three *reis*, about $3.00 (in 1996), and usually about two hundred people would play. In this way the parish earned a bit of money, and wealth was redistributed in the community.

Utilitarian objects

In *The Social Life of Things*, Igor Kopytoff (1986) introduces the concept of a biographical approach in the study of objects. For example, he questions what are the recognized periods in an object's life? What is the expected life of an object, how does its life change with age, and what happens to it when it is no longer useful? These questions can be applied to the inanimate category of votive offerings, composed of utilitarian objects such as crutches or a pair of glasses that are no longer needed due to the intervention of a miracle. No longer living their original lives, they become transformed into emblematic objects that have become imbued with magical or sacred powers. Many such items appeared in the *caixa*, the bin, where *ex-votos* were deposited. These items had previous functions before they became votive objects, and in many cases their "lives" continued even after being deposited, through recycling. On a regular basis, someone in need from the community, and occasionally a pilgrim, would ask if a pair of crutches, a cane, a pair of eyeglasses, and on one or two occasions, even a prosthesis had recently been deposited. As a rule, when an object such as this is offered, it is culled from the bin and set aside for just such a situation. Since there are no social services to furnish these items to those in need, this ritual often fills that gap. Also, on occasion, the docents might look the other way when a child would come in, see a cloth *ex-voto* that had been left in the bin, grab it and gleefully run away. To the child, the object did not represent a miracle, but instead looked like a perfectly good doll going to waste. Additionally, if a

pair of shoes, a pair of pants, or a straw hat might benefit someone else in need, they are removed from the bin and quietly given to that individual.

Inanimate articles that functioned in another capacity before becoming votive offerings ranged from items of modern medical technology such as x-rays, sonograms, biopsy results, and contact lens cases, to saline drip bottles and disposable syringes.

Another item that was offered upon occasion was a bottle of cachaça. Cachaça is a locally produced and very potent alcohol similar to rum, made from sugar cane. Drinking excessive amounts of cachaça seems to promote very aggressive behavior. Its abuse plays a role in most instances of domestic violence and is recognized as one of Brazil's most prevalent social problems.

Other manufactured items offered include medicine bottles, surgical garments, army uniforms, soccer balls and jerseys, body casts, false teeth, orthodontic retainers, composition books from local schools, photographs in pierced tin or wooden frames, pieces of machinery, spark plugs, roofing tiles, leg braces, orthopedic shoes, bridal veils, and huge clay cooking pots.

Items representing local agricultural production such as bottles of oil made from castor beans and carnaúba palms, dried corn stalks, jars of beans, dried gourds — sometimes decorated with designs and other times plain —, manioc meal, and occupational tools such as the machete and hoe were also offered to St. Francis in thanksgiving for bountiful crops.

Exuvial fluids and materials

Also deposited in the *caixa* were jars filled with mysterious body fluids and materials such as gallstones and kidney stones. Other exuvial offerings that I saw were fingernail clippings, dried umbilical cords, teeth, and hair. There is a special bin in the House of Miracles for the deposition of hair. Sometimes women brought in braids of their hair that

had been previously cut. Other times, it would be done on the spot. It was always a very emotional scene. I remember one instance in particular. A young girl of about fifteen or sixteen came to the House of Miracles with her mother. The girl had recovered from a high fever, most likely dengue. She had beautiful thick dark hair that reached all the way down her back. As her mother removed the scissors from her bag, the young girl started to cry. She kept repeating, "Not much, Mother, please not much." Unfortunately, her mother wanted to make sure that the *promessa* was repaid in full and cut her daughter's hair off to her shoulders. As about two feet of her hair was removed, the young girl cried so pitifully, everyone around was caught up in their actions. By the time the scissors were put away there was hardly a dry eye in the building.

I rarely saw anyone able to keep from crying as her/his hair was shorn. Children were often brought to the House of Miracles and given their first haircut. This was usually in repayment by their mothers, thanking St. Francis for keeping their children alive until they reach seven years of age. It is thought that if a child lives until then s/he has a good chance reaching maturity.

All of the offered hair is kept in the special bin until it is filled. Then it is collected in big bags and taken to Fortaleza to sell to wig makers, with the revenue used for worthy causes within the parish.

Wearing the *batina*

Many pilgrims wear clothes made from brown cloth until they arrive at the House of Miracles. These brown clothes are meant to pay homage to the brown robes worn by St. Francis. They also represent the uniform of the "nation" of St. Francis. Many people who live in Canindé do not wear the traditional brown robe, but do take a vow to always dress in brown in honor of St. Francis. I also noticed that many owners of the shops and restaurants would dress in brown when they knew large numbers of pilgrims would be in

town. The question arises if this were a true show of solidarity or just good business sense?

There is a special bin in the House of Miracles to hold these garments. In one corner of the House of Miracles is a folding screen behind which the more modest can remove the ritual garment and change into regular clothes. When children changed out of the robes, it seemed to be more auspicious than when an adult did. Children almost always had brand new clothes, often still commercially wrapped, to put on. This symbolized a sort of rite of passage, marking a transition in their lives from one stage of childhood to the next. When the bins are full, these *batinas* are taken to the monastery to be washed. The garments are then taken to different parishes throughout the interior to be worn by future pilgrims.

There is one other category of pilgrim dress that I want to remark upon and that is the dress of wealthier urbanites who visit the shrine. St. Francis of Wounds, being the patron saint of the poor, is not widely followed by members of the upper classes. Most of these visitors arrived on a Sunday and rarely if ever brought an *ex-voto*, preferring instead to put money into the alms box. While some of these people are earnest pilgrims, most fall into the category of a sort of religious tourist. They would come to the House of Miracles, very rarely even touching the *ex-votos* in the bin, and look around. It is interesting to me, however, that they usually dressed in expensive and fashionable clothing in shades of brown. Again, is this a show of solidarity or just trying to blend in?

Walking the "Stations of the Cross"

In addition to bringing an *ex-voto* to repay their promise, many pilgrims would walk the "Stations of the Cross." These stations, depicting fourteen stages of Jesus' ordeal during his trial by Pontius Pilate and his crucifixion, are located on the *Via Sacra* which ascends a steep hill in Canindé. The first station is at the base of the hill and the fourteenth

at the top where the *Igreja de Cristo Rei* is located. The walk is quite taxing and made doubly tiring when performed under the hot tropical sun. This ritual action is compounded at the first station when the pilgrims picks up a stone to place on their heads. At each succeeding station the rock is exchanged for a larger one, until by the time the last station is reached, the rock weighs several pounds. Watching this procession was very illuminating to me. Some people behaved in the somber, reverent manner that I expected, while others laughed and chatted with other people. I even saw some people holding the rocks on their heads with one hand while smoking cigarettes or drinking Coca Colas with the other. Obviously, the cultural bias that I brought from the United States, where reverent behavior is usually somber, was nullified through this and other examples. I now realize that reverence, like most behaviors is subjective and culturally constructed.

Mortification of the flesh

Religious mortification of the flesh usually connotes hair shirts, self-flagellation and acts of crucifixion, practices common in religious groups such as the *Penitentes* found in parts of Mexico and the United States. To my knowledge, such practices are not associated with the followers of St. Francis. However, while the carrying of a cross on a daily basis for several weeks or months certainly would qualify as quite rigorous, circumambulating the Basilica or climbing the expanse of concrete steps from the grotto to the cathedral on hands and knees is the most common method of repaying a *promessa* through physical pain and suffering. Payment in this fashion is no small undertaking. The circumference of the Basilica is several hundred yards of rough textured concrete, and there are about thirty steep concrete steps from the grotto to the top. I witnessed an eighty year old woman ascending the steps on her knees refusing any help in her climb. When she reached the top she could not stand, but appeared glowing with happiness. I saw three different pilgrims on their knees making the trip around the cathedral. One was

holding the hand of a friend and had pads on her knees, one had no pads but did have the support of a friend, and one had no pads and no support. The fabric was completely gone from the knees of his pants and his legs were bleeding freely. In all of these instances the pilgrims remarked that St. Francis had bled for them and they wanted to repay him in kind.

Walking to Canindé

Pilgrims will pay their *promessa* by walking to Canindé. Usually family groups or neighbors will join together to make the trip, walking at night to avoid the heat. In fact, there is a plaque on the wall of the House of Miracles commemorating one such group who was killed by being hit by a transport lorry while on their way to Canindé. The road to Canindé is extremely hazardous, filled with gigantic potholes which can literally overturn a car. To avoid these potholes, vehicles going both ways veer from their lanes. Terrific accidents with many fatalities are not uncommon.

I was told that many wealthy people from Fortaleza promise St. Francis to make the journey on foot. However, their chauffeur driven cars creep along behind them, and periodically the pilgrims avail themselves of air-conditioning and refreshments before continuing on. The leg of the journey through the streets of Canindé to the shrine is completed alone. The car will proceed to the shrine and await their arrival, upon which they are retrieved and carried home in comfort.

While I was in Canindé the governor of Ceará came to pay his promise to St. Francis after a successful re-election. He arrived by helicopter, preceded by vans of television camera crews, and was whisked the four or five blocks to the shrine by an awaiting car driven by the head of the monastery. He dashed in, knelt in front of the statue, jumped back into the car after a brief photo opportunity and was back in the sky within about fifteen minutes! While he did not walk to Canindé, his was definitely the most spectacular arrival that I witnessed.

Two other arrivals did, however, create quite a stir. They were the *Homen do Crux* and another young man who walked to Canindé carrying a heavy wooden cross. The second young man had been walking barefoot for two days. His cross was simply fashioned from two young pine trees and did not have the benefit of wheels like the *Homen do Crux's*. He made his pilgrimage carrying a cross to repay St. Francis for healing his foot. He was an agricultural worker, as are most residents of this region. Again, like most workers, he did not have protective foot gear and worked, instead, either in bare feet or wearing rubber flip flops. He told me that a heavy log had fallen across the instep of his right foot, breaking it. Farmworkers in this area have nothing remotely resembling Workman's Compensation. They do not even have sick days. The prospect of missing work and perhaps losing his job prompted his appeal to St. Francis. The young man said that in two days his foot was as good as new, and he was here to make good on this half of the bargain. I looked closely at his foot, and it had healed so cleanly that I could not even see a mark.

Photographs

Photographs are another popular way of paying a promise. Few *sertanejos* own a camera and to have a photograph taken is a costly undertaking. As a result, the value placed upon a photograph is far greater than would be expected in the United States. Offering a photograph of yourself is felt to be a visual reminder to St. Francis of your devotion. There is a big wooden box in the House of Miracles where people can place their photographs. Periodically, the docents will take down the old photographs covering the walls of the House of Miracles and replace them with new ones. The old photographs are taken down and burned with the other *ex-votos*. Many people promise St. Francis that they will put their photograph on the wall in the House of Miracles and are disturbed when they are not permitted to paste them up themselves. Many will try to put theirs on the

wall surreptitiously and end up being rebuked by the docents. The subjects of the photographs include people in uniforms of the army, soccer teams, grade school classes, and various occupations. Occupational photos are typified by examples such as a bus driver in his bus, a policeman with his rifle, lorry drivers in their trucks, farmers on tractors or with animals, and a beautician in her shop. Brides in gowns, graduates in caps and gowns, children in First Communion clothes, people of all ages in various stages of health and ill health, people with amputations, stitches, tumors, infected sores, advanced stages of elephantiasis, leprosy, and other topical diseases, new cars, new homes, storefronts, airplanes, fishing boats, crops in fields, pets, people in surgery, even people in their coffins are in pictures that cover the walls. When I questioned people about the photographs of the deceased, I found that in most cases these individuals had been unable to come to Canindé to repay their promise before they died, so a friend or relative made a photograph of the deceased and completed the pilgrimage for them in this way.

An interesting photograph of another type was of a little girl, two or three years old. She was dressed in the brown clothing of a pilgrim, yet she was standing next to a statue, almost as big as she, of St. Barbara. This is a relatively obscure saint in the Roman Catholic religion, but in Afro-Brazilian religions the image of St. Barbara is used to depict a very powerful deity, *Yansâ*, goddess of storms. What better example can there be to illustrate the heterodox practices of Brazilian religion than is found in this photograph of a child wearing the pilgrimage uniform honoring a Catholic saint, while posed next to a Afro-Brazilian deity?

People do pay professional photographers to take their picture in Canindé. At least four sites around the Basilica have commercial photographers who hang a backdrop painted with a large image of St. Francis and the Basilica on it. People come to these backdrops to have their picture "taken with St. Francis" and pay five *reis* (about $5.00 in 1996) for one of these quick developing photographs. This price is quite steep, and in

most cases the expenditure is only made for a child. These photographs are in some instances taken home as religious souvenirs and placed upon home altars. However, most often these photos are placed in the photo box in the House of Miracles to reinforce the "power" of their *ex-votos*.

Fireworks

To me, one of the most irritating ways to fulfill a *promessa* is by purchasing and setting off firecrackers. On feast days and weekends, the serenity of Canindé is constantly interrupted by the deafening boom of *fogos*, fireworks, being shot in the park below the Basilica. At times the air was so filled with the acrid smoke of these *fogos* that my eyes would burn. It could never accurately be explained to me how this activity pleased St. Francis and became accepted as a means of payment. I do know, however, that the young boys and men who employed this method enjoyed themselves immensely.

Tithes

Lastly, people fulfilled their contract with St. Francis by giving away money. Money could be given to the Church by putting it anonymously in the donation box in the Basilica or by paying for a special Mass. Many people gave money to the ever present *esmolas* (beggars) who arrived early and stayed late around the shrine. Several local people who worked for the church spoke disparagingly about the beggars and told me that some of the them lived quite comfortably on the money they earned in this way and could be seen wearing nice clean clothes, rather than the dirty, tattered "costume" worn during their "working hours." However, I never saw evidence of this and suspect that it may be a form of derisive urban legend.

In a similar vein, I was also told about a woman who tithed half of her monthly income to St. Francis. She was one of the local prostitutes who gave her wages in return

for good health and a steady clientele. Dance halls and houses of prostitution located outside the lands owned by the Church are kept busy by the many people coming into Canindé. In fact, during the Festival of St. Francis celebrated in early October, prostitutes from other cities come to work in the local establishments to accommodate the huge influx of people into the town. While pilgrimage may be the primary reason for coming to Canindé, for most people this is also the one time of the year when they can get away from the drudgery of farmwork and have a vacation. Once the responsibility of fulfilling the promise to St. Francis has been accomplished other activities can began. In Brazil the separation between the secular and the sacred is not so distinct as in the United States. For example, the souvenir stands which line the streets during Festival sell pictures of saints side by side with those of rock stars. What is more, the half a dozen restaurants located across the plaza from the Basilica and throughout the town count on the pilgrims drinking great amounts of beer each weekend to make their monthly revenue. Several of these establishments are owned by the Church.

Recycled objects

Appadurai's ideas on the changing social lives of things can be further explored in the category of *ex-votos* crafted from recognizable recycled materials. Plastic parts of a doll's anatomy are frequently used as replicative *milagres*. People also employ plaster parts from store mannequins in this way. Other examples of material reuse I saw were shoe boxes altered to represent houses; the top of a plastic liter bottle fashioned into a breast; cardboard from boxes cut to resemble paperdolls, hands, and feet; and similar objects made from styrofoam. One of the most interesting *ex-votos* of this type was made from a rolled up x-ray. The x-ray was used as the leg from the knee to ankle and a cardboard foot had been attached. I asked the man about his injury and he said that he

had broken his leg in a motorcycle accident. He had asked St. Francis to help heal his leg. He had saved the x-ray of his leg from the hospital and fashioned his *milagre* from it.

The life of an *ex-voto* can be extended when it is reused by another pilgrim. Several times I saw pilgrims come to the bin empty-handed, look over the *ex-votos*, and choose one that corresponded to their needs and aesthetics. Many times they would hold it for a while, perhaps as Suzanne Preston Blier (1995) suggests, to "activate" it as their own. Then they would wrap a bit of their hair around it, tie a *fita* around it, or even write their name upon it to reinforce the new role it was playing, and re-deposit it.

Related to recycling, although not deposited in the bins as offerings, are broken religious statuary. Since these items, once blessed by priests, are considered sacred, they are disposed of by being placed in the *ex-voto* receptacle. If a statue is minimally damaged or if the broken pieces are included, they are removed from the bin and given to one of the Franciscan brothers to be recycled. The *frei* glues the pieces together and gives the statue to someone who can't afford to purchase one. I saw statuary representing St. Francis and Jesus deposited most often, but others included St. George, whose statue is used to depict a powerful *orixá* in Afro-Brazilian religions, but rarely prayed to in the Roman Catholic religion; the Virgin Mary; the Black Madonna *Nossa Senhora Aparecida*, a patron saint of Brazil; and Padre Cicero, the very popular folk saint, who has a shrine devoted to him in Joaziero del Norte, also in the state of Ceará.

I found it interesting that people disposed of the statuary in this manner rather than tossing it in the wastebin, and asked why this was done. No one could give me a good reason, usually replying that it was just done that way. After returning home and reading *The Archaeology of Ritual and Magic*, by Ralph Merrifield, I came across his discussion of the *favissa*, the ritual pits used by the Romans to dispose of sacrificial animals. In this discussion, he notes that the Roman word *sacer*, which is derived from the same Latin root as sacred, sacrifice, and sacrilegious, means much the same thing as the Polynesian

word *tabu*. He goes on to say that "[s]acred things were dangerous and had to be disposed of with proper care when they were no longer required" (1987:44). The attitude of sacred items being potent and dangerous has, subconsciously perhaps, survived to the present. Blier (1995) also discusses the danger present in the "activation" and "deactivation" of religious articles utilized in African Vodun. The fact that the statues are discarded in the *ex-voto* bin to be included in the mass burning of the *ex-votos*, could justify that this is a belief in Canindé and could, again, exemplify the creolization of Roman Catholic and African practices that defines religion in Brazil. It could also, as Merrifield suggests, illustrate that ritual behavior has greater longevity than the gods for which the rituals originated (1987: 88).

B. Commercially crafted, mass-produced *ex-votos*

Ex-votos have been commercially mass-produced since Roman times. From their findings, archaeologists have interpreted that shops selling terra cotta and wooden *ex-votos* lined the street outside temples to Aesculapius and Minerva (Jackson 1988). Contemporary forms of these commercially made *ex-votos* can be found outside most shrine sites in Latin America and the North American Southwest. These replicative votive offerings are usually cast out of base metals or cut from tin. The images are usually in miniature dimensions and can be purchased for little money. In most Latin American countries, it is unusual to find a handmade three-dimensional *ex-voto*, at least this is what my reading has dictated. This may be true or it may reflect a gap in the scholarship of this subject. Perhaps if smaller, more rural shrines were investigated, findings would show a similarity to Canindé, where commercially made *ex-votos* are atypical.

Replicative *milagres* commercially crafted in Brazil are made from *cera* (wax) or *gesso* (plaster). These pre-formed *milagres* make up a small percentage of the offerings in

Canindé; however, their numbers are increasing each year. Molded wax *ex-votos* must be purchased in a large commercial center so their numbers will probably never be high in Canindé. Plaster ones can readily be purchased in commercial centers but can also be purchased in Canindé from a local sculptor. I witnessed this type of *ex-voto* almost always being brought to Canindé by a more sophisticated, urban person than the typical pilgrim. The appearance of more and more of these prefabricated *milagres* may signal that more people from urban areas are traveling to Canindé to pay their promises. It might also suggest that these people do not want to take the time to fashion a *milagre* in the traditional manner, by hand. When I spoke with one of the *freis* about this, he declared that the prefabricated *ex-votos* were "*sem alma*," without soul, and feared that this might also reflect the religious attitude of certain portions of the population as well.

I have but one story from a pilgrim who brought a plaster *ex-voto*. Other than this man, none of the people bringing plaster *ex-votos* had any interest in speaking with me about their *promessa*. These people are perhaps coming from an entirely different world than are the other pilgrims. Theirs is a world of relative prosperity, opportunity and representation. They have a voice and thus had no need to enlist mine. The one gentleman who did agree to speak with me was reluctant and had to be talked into it. He had hurt his leg in an automobile accident and was still walking with a slight limp. He had purchased the plaster leg in Fortaleza (he could not remember how much he paid for it) and was bringing it to Canindé to pay his promise. He allowed me to take his picture but refused my offering of a Polaroid shot in exchange. He seemed relieved when our talk was over and was quick to leave the House of Miracles. This is quite a contrast to most of the pilgrims I spoke with who often ended up telling me more than I really wanted to know about themselves.

Molded wax

Wax *ex-votos* have been offered for centuries, but since they were usually melted down for re-use, there are few examples remaining. A group dating from the fifteenth century escaped destruction and were found in England at Exeter Cathedral on a ledge over the tomb of Bishop Edmund Lacey. The group of wax *ex-votos* consisted of a series of miniature heads, arms, legs, animal and human feet, and the figure of a woman (Radford 1949). The Brazilian tradition of offering molded wax *milagres* is more commonly found in urban areas such as the shrine to *Nosso Senhor do Bonfim* in Salvador where the walls and ceiling of a small chapel are covered in wax anatomical representations. These areas are centers for processing wax byproducts from the carnaúba palm. The people offering these wax *ex-votos* come to Canindé from urban areas, usually Fortaleza, and appear more affluent than the typical pilgrim. I never witnessed them dressed in the thin brown pilgrimage robes; however, they might wear a stylish brown outfit. Transportation to Canindé was in the family vehicle rather than by a public form. They usually arrived on Sunday and lunched in one of the new modern restaurants on the highway on the outskirts of town before visiting Canindé.

Molded wax images that I saw offered include various sized and shaped heads of males, females and children; arms and legs of several sizes; a house; a female torso made from a mold of the "Venus de Milo"; breasts, single and paired; female reproductive organs: ovaries, fallopian tubes, and womb, all molded separately; hands; feet; and a specially made plaque with a valentine shaped heart on it. This latter *milagre* was offered by a man from Rio de Janeiro who had been ill for months. He had gone to several doctors and none could ascertain what was wrong with him. He made a plea to St. Francis to help the doctors diagnose his malady, and the next doctor found three blockages to his heart. After a successful surgery, he commissioned a wax heart with

three red stripes to illustrate the blockages and traveled all the way from Rio to repay St. Francis.

Plaster

The plaster *milagres* are either brought from other cities, or they can be commissioned from Bibi, a local artist. Bibi, famous for both sacred and secular statuary, has won national awards and received many commissions for public sculpture. He lives in Canindé to be near the shrine of St. Francis, and his house on the outskirts of town is situated so that the Basilica can be seen from his studio. He seldom carves wooden *ex-votos* anymore, as he feels it is too time consuming for the monetary return. The last *ex-voto* he carved, a head, was several years ago. He charged around thirty *reis* (about $30) for it. Bibi will now only make plaster *ex-votos* for people and says that he makes three or four a month, but during the week of the festival in October usually makes many more. He says the cost of these varies according to whom it is for and how busy he is doing his other work.

Plaster images that were deposited during my stay included heads, all sizes and shapes depicting males, females and children; a female torso depicting a fetus in the womb; male genitalia; an eyeball; an ear; hands and feet all sizes; legs and arms all sizes; a nose; breasts, single and paired; and two ovoid shapes the size of an egg. I did not speak with the pilgrim who deposited these ovoid shapes. I do not know if they represent actual eggs to illustrate the health of a chicken or if they might be a symbol for human fertility. The images were always cast in white plaster In a few cases a red mark denoting a surgical incision or some type of wound was applied. Also, in a few instances a head might be painted to depict skin tone, hair and eye color, and the application of make-up.

I must agree with the sentiment that these plaster *ex-votos* were "without soul." Not only were they cold to the touch, the lack of individuality, even with the application of paint, could not imbue them with the "life" that radiates from the hand-crafted *ex-votos.*

C. Hand crafted *ex-votos*: two and three dimensional

The category of hand-crafted *ex-votos* includes two and three dimensional images, both of which have European precedents during the Middle Ages and include drawn and written offerings as well as forms made from wood, clay, cloth, and other materials.

Two-dimensional: drawings and writings on paper

Two-dimensional *ex-votos* have a strong history in Europe and can be found in the collections of most major cathedrals in Europe and Latin America. Painted on canvas, wood, or sheets of metal, these votive offerings depict scenes illustrating miracles that resulted from the intercession of the Virgin Mary, Jesus, or a particular saint. This tradition traveled to Brazil during early Portuguese colonization (Barreto n.d.; Bastide 1951, 1978; Bercht 1989; Cardoso 1983; de Kadt 1967; della Cava 1970; Frota 1989; Mota 1968) and is depicted in the novel *Tenda dos Milagres* (Tent of Miracles) by Brazilian author Jorge Amado (1971). However, this tradition was never very active in the interior of Brazil and is completely absent from the ritual found in Canindé today. I did see a few two-dimensional *ex-votos* on sheets of paper illustrating miracles. These drawings, however, rather than illustrating a scene similar to the older painted *ex-votos* depicting the presence of saints performing miracles, instead simply depict a healed anatomical affliction such as lung cancer. In one such drawing, offered while I was in the House of Miracles, a man had drawn two fairly accurate pairs of lungs, one showing the damage suffered from lung cancer and the other showing pink healthy lungs. Underneath

the drawings he had written that his first x-ray had shown extensive tumors covering his lungs. After he made a *promessa* with St. Francis, he had another x-ray taken. This time, miraculously, there were no signs of the cancer and his lungs were perfectly healthy.

I also saw people place slips of paper in the bin. This type of votive is common in other parts of the world, especially in Roman Catholic shrines throughout the American Southwest (Romano 1965). On these slips of paper people wrote messages to St. Francis thanking him for his intercession on their behalf. Again, the illiteracy which is widespread in Northeast Brazil, especially within the age group of the typical pilgrim (i.e. over forty), results in this type of offering not being represented by a large portion of the *ex-votos* at Canindé. However, it is interesting that many wooden *ex-votos* are written upon. I will discuss these narrated *ex-votos* in the section on wooden offerings.

Three-dimensional

Three-dimensional votive offerings can be found throughout the world and across religious boundaries. Whether one is studying *Vodun* offerings in Haiti and Africa, Hindi offerings in India, or Roman Catholic offerings in Mexico, three-dimensional votive offerings will be found. Three dimensional *ex-votos* are the most common type of votive offering in Canindé and come in a range of materials. For the most part, they can be catalogued into those made from bee's wax, cloth, clay, wood, and less commonly from concrete, styrofoam, paper maché, and stone. Stone *ex-votos*, which are carved or etched, are extremely rare in Canindé. Unfortunately, I never witnessed one being offered. I was made aware of their existence because they are collected by one of the local *freis*, who kindly shared his collection with me. *Ex-votos* from the other materials will be discussed in the following pages.

1. Bee's wax

The *ex-votos* made from the almost black aromatic wax taken from domesticated bee hives are also rare in Canindé. In fact, they are deposited so infrequently that each time one appears in the *caixa* it is quickly removed by one of the docents to give to another local *frei* for his collection. I saw several offerings molded from the pliant, dark wax. On each occasion they represented either a hand, foot, or head and measured about three inches in height.

2. Cloth

Cloth *ex-votos* are almost always made by women. These offerings are hand sewn from fabric scraps and are usually stuffed in much the same way as the rag dolls they make for their children. These pieces are stuffed with cotton, human or animal hair, grass, or more material scraps and depict whole bodies, or just afflicted parts. I saw limbs, internal organs, human bodies, animals, eyes, and ears made from fabric. Details such as facial characteristics and wounds are drawn on or might be illustrated through embroidery. Hair is made from animal or human hair, yarn, or string. External problems such as tumors or swellings are depicted by extra stuffing or sewing a lump onto the afflicted area. In most cases the fabric choice for the skin was a solid color, although it might have been blue, green, or a floral print as these offerings are made from scraps.

One of the most poignant *ex-votos* that was offered while I was in Canindé was for a little girl who had died. It was a small casket covered in white cloth which opened to reveal a small cloth doll. The doll had black yarn for hair and was dressed completely in white. I was told that it represented a little girl who had died and was buried in her First Communion dress. Even though she had died, her parents wanted to repay their *promessa* to St. Francis and had no ill feeling against him. They said that they knew he had tried to intercede on their behalf, but that it was God's will that she die.

3. Styrofoam

Styrofoam offerings are relatively new in Canindé and are crafted from left over packaging material from television and audio equipment boxes. I saw images cut similar to paperdolls, and cut-outs of traced hands and feet. I also saw a fairly accurate tracing of a femur and a three dimensional leg with foot attached. On this styrofoam leg a gouge was removed to represent a wound which had been painted red. I also saw a house that had been glued together from thin sheets of this material. An interesting offering fashioned from styrofoam was in the shape of an airplane. Since I missed seeing it being offered I do not know its story. However, it was offered a few days after the terrific TWA crash that occurred during the summer of 1996. This story received quite a lot of coverage by the Brazilian media. Unfortunately, I have no way of knowing if this incident was related to or prompted the offering of this *milagre*. I was lucky to photograph the airplane as soon as I saw it in the bin because shortly thereafter a small boy climbed into the bin, grabbed it, and ran away. The last view I had of this *ex-voto* was to see it sailing through the air in the hands of a delighted seven or eight year old child.

4. Clay

Ex-votos fashioned from clay are second only to those made from wood in their frequency of deposit. The arid climate of the *sertão* will not support many varieties of trees. Instead, there are a few scrub pines, several forms of cacti, and some low growing brush. Clay, however, is readily available. Many people utilize the natural clay in the soil in construction of their houses. Most are made of clay brick similar to that used in adobe construction except in the poorest *barros*, neighborhoods, where people use clay in their *taipa* houses which are made of simple wattle and daub construction. Most of the *ex-votos* are made of this same clay and vary in color, ranging from grey to bright orange, depending upon where the clay is from. These clay *milagres* are hand modeled and are

not glazed or fired, though some are polished with a stone in a similar technique to that used in some Native American pottery in the United States. The figures are simply left in the hot sun of this tropical climate to bake and harden. Most of these types of *ex-votos* are small, ranging in size from three to five inches, as anything bigger would become brittle before hardening. I did see one *milagre* of a leg that was about twelve inches long. It was extremely dense and heavy and broke apart soon after being placed in the votive offering bin. Most of the images that I saw being made from clay were small, simple hands, feet, heads, breasts, fingers, toes, and human forms reminiscent of early votive figures that have been found archaeologically throughout Europe. In most cases these clay pieces have no addition of color, but a few of them have what appears to be a thick paint applied to them to denote a wound or other pertinent feature.

There is a wide range of technical skill demonstrated in these offerings. In most cases the works are crude and rather child-like. However, I saw several heads, one figure of a pregnant woman, and one long-horned steer, that could have been modeled in an advanced art class. These figures were taken out of the bin and placed on a long shelf in the House of Miracles that is reserved for exceptional pieces. This shelf acts as a sort of rotating art exhibit where pieces are displayed until they are either replaced by something better, taken into a private collection, or taken to the small museum run by the parish.

5. Wood

Wooden *ex-votos* far outnumber other types of offerings. The literally thousands of examples are too numerous to be fully covered in this short work. Most wooden *ex-votos* are simply fashioned from a light wood, probably the scrub pine. When I asked pilgrims what kind of wood they had used, they did not know the names of the trees; instead, their response would usually be "*dura*" (hard) or "*macia*" (soft), relating to the difficulty of working with it. A Brazilian publication listed the following types of wood as those

commonly used in making the *ex-votos*: *camurú, imburana-de-espinho, imburana-de-cheiro, pau-d'alho, pau-branco, aroeira, cedro, timbaúba, pau-d'arco, mulugu,* and *tambor* (Medeiros 1987:27).

In some cases, I was told that the wood was taken from scrap piles at building sites or procured from a mill. While most offerings were carved with only a small knife, others showed evidence of being turned on a lathe, honed with a rasp, and even shaped by a jig saw. Usually the offerings were carved from one piece of wood, but I witnessed some with joinery that ranged from a simple nail attachment to sophisticated pegging.

These *ex-votos* were often detailed to fully illustrate the disease or trauma from which the pilgrim had been healed. Paint, pencil marks, the removal of chips of wood, or application of additional wood was used for this purpose. In many cases, the entire story of the problem and its alleviation due to the intercession of St. Francis was recorded on the piece, including the date of the *promessa*, the name of the pilgrim, and the date of the pilgrimage to Canindé. For example, upon an *ex-voto* representing a leg was written: "*Agadeço a Deus, e a intercecão ele São Francisco das Chagas, por eu ter ficado boa da dor que eu sintio na minha coxa e quadril direito. Peco a São Francisco das Chagas que rogue a Deus nosso porque agora en gique da dor que esto u sentendo no meu ombro direito." Francisco Freitas Araugo, Rua Ile Somiro de Castro 3962, Fortaleza, Ceará 26 Julho 1996*. This translates as, "Thank God and the intercession of St. Francis of Wounds, for I have stayed well and my hip feels better. I beg of St. Francis as the emissary of our God because now I have come to feel a pain in my shoulder." This is followed by the name and address of the pilgrim and the date the *ex-voto* was brought to Canindé. This is an interesting example because the pilgrim is both thanking St. Francis for the healing of his hip and asking him for another favor: to help in the healing his shoulder.

Many *ex-votos* showed no physical sign of trauma whatsoever. I was given two explanations for this, which I have already mentioned briefly. Dr. Adalberto Barreto, Brazilian anthropologist and psychiatrist, suggests that when heads show no sign of trauma they are often representative of an internal problem such as anxiety. Dr. Barreto has been inventorying the *ex-votos* in Canindé for the past fifteen years and says that numbers of these types of offerings are increasing each year. He goes on to say that this is indicative of the growing sense of unrest due to the astronomical level of inflation, the rising rate of unemployment, and the general mistrust of the government that is felt by the Brazilian population (Barreto: personal communication).

The other explanation I received about the *ex-votos* exhibiting no evidence of physical trauma was from one of the *ex-voto* carvers. She said that she is often requested to carve an *ex-voto* that is perfect to illustrate that the miracle has occurred and that the person has been healed. Both of these interpretations make perfect sense; however, the true story behind any particular *ex-voto* can only be ascertained by speaking with the pilgrim who offers it.

Wooden *ex-votos* are offered representing almost anything imaginable, ranging from anatomical offerings and occupational equipment, to animals, just to name just a few. Literally every part of the internal and external body is carved in wood. I saw every body part carved three-dimensionally or in bas-relief including intestines, kidneys, and lungs, to eyeballs, genitalia, and tongues. I saw many depictions of the heart. Some were shaped like valentines, others realistically, while others looked like the sacred hearts found in religious paintings, complete with flames.

The first pilgrim whom I interviewed was a young girl with a heart condition. She was dressed in the brown pilgrimage robes and was with her mother. Both of them were somber and I hesitated to approach them. As it turned out, they were glad to tell me their story and very happy to receive the photograph that I gave them. The young girl had very

pink cheeks and upon first glance looked quite healthy. After she told me about her heart condition, she raised the hem of the robe, revealing matchstick thin legs which were badly splotched due to poor circulation. The doctor had told the girl's mother that the heat in this region was very bad for the girl's condition. Her mother appealed to St. Francis to help them. Soon afterwards, the girl's aunt, who lives in São Paulo where it is much cooler, invited them to live with her. Before leaving for São Paulo, they had come to Canindé to repay St. Francis for his intercession. The girl showed me her *milagre* which had been carved for her by her mother's cousin. The heart was carved from what looked to be mahogany and had been copied from a religious picture showing the flaming heart of Jesus. As a result, the heart resembled a small pineapple.

So far as *ex-votos* reflecting occupational equipment are concerned, I saw only boats being offered during my field work, but I have seen equipment such as tractors and earth movers in museum collections. Of course, in the rural Northeast, most animal *milagres* that are offered could also be considered as occupational equipment. In this category I saw horses and donkeys depicted fully and also represented by just a leg or hoof. One day I saw a young woman holding a carved image of a donkey in her hand. She seemed reluctant to place it in the bin, so I took the opportunity of going over and asking her the story behind the donkey. She told me that she and her parents lived on a small farm further in the backlands. They had a wonderful donkey that helped them plow and carry things to market. Usually, the donkey slept in the house with them, but one night he had gotten out and wandered away. When they woke up the next morning, they called for him and looked everywhere, but he was nowhere to be found. Without him to help on the farm, the work was very hard. She also said that she missed him very much. The donkey was missing for about six weeks. Her family appealed to St. Francis to please help them find their donkey. One morning about a week after making the *promessa* they awoke to

find their donkey standing in front of their house. Her father carved the *milagre*, and she had come to Canindé to repay their promise.

Other carved votive objects that I saw include houses, bottles, caskets, automobiles, crosses, and even a replica of the trophy of the *Cuppa do Mundo*, the World Cup of soccer, won by Brazil in 1994.

D. The carvers

Most pilgrims coming to Canindé carve their own *ex-voto* or commission it from a relative or neighbor who has experience working with wood (Figure 9). In most cases, the offerings are carved free of charge, for just a small price, or in exchange for something like a pack of cigarettes or a soda (Figure 10). I frequently noticed that artistic detail made it obvious that certain *ex-votos* were carved by the same hand. In most cases, the pilgrims who offered these had traveled to Canindé from another part of the region, and I was unable to speak with the carver. I was, in any case, able to speak with four local carvers. In addition to Bibi, pilgrims living in Canindé or pilgrims with the means to commission an *ex-voto* locally may choose from Maria Édite, Manuel Alves de Sousa, and Izaias.

Maria Édite has worked at the small museum adjacent to the shrine for twenty-six years. Every day you can see her sitting in the open doorway carving with her red Swiss Army knife and trying to benefit from what little breeze may be circulating. She carves small crucifixes; *figas*, the small good luck charms associated originally with Afro-Brazilian religions, but now widely accepted; and the wooden T's worn by the *freis* to sell to pilgrims and tourists as souvenirs. She also accepts commissions for *ex-votos* for which she never charges a fee. For this reason, she does not like to make them. Interestingly, she signs her *ex-votos*, the only carver I know of who does this. In the hundreds of *milagres* that I examined, I saw no other signature or maker's mark. Since she works in

the museum she is more aware of the value of these offerings as art, and it makes her uncomfortable that these works that were made to be destroyed might sometimes be on display. She takes great pride in her work and feels that to make an *ex-voto* takes too much of her time. However, she wanted there to be no works mistaken for hers, and as a result she began signing her work a few years ago. While I was in Canindé I saw a leg, a breast, and two hands deposited that were carved by Maria Édite. When I first arrived in Canindé I asked several *freis* if they knew any local *ex-voto* carvers with whom I could speak. Interestingly, no one mentioned Maria Édite even though she has worked for them for twenty-six years and has been carving all those years. I later found out that another *frei* whom I had not asked, one who teaches occupational training to some of the local youth, furnishes Maria with wood for her carvings. I do not think that the *freis* I questioned were deliberately withholding this information. It is possible that they had no idea that she carved *ex-votos*. I think it illustrates instead a general lack of interest in the museum and the *ex-voto* tradition on the part of the clergy, perhaps resulting from their tacit exclusion from it.

Manuel Alves de Sousa lives in the *Barro dos Montes*, a very poor neighborhood in Canindé. Here dirt streets are lined with cramped houses that have no running water, and are often shared by many family members as well as animals. Manuel has worked as a carpenter for a long time and told me that he "understood wood." He told me that he is really a farmer, but like so many other *sertanejos* has no land upon which to work. He has been making *ex-votos* for people in his neighborhood for many years and only accepts money if people offer. He never asks. Usually people furnish him with the wood for their *ex-votos*. He uses a large knife to rough out the image and a small penknife for detail. One day while I was visiting in *Barro dos Montes*, I noticed a little boy sitting outside his house. He was dressed in a brown pilgrimage robe and said he was waiting on his mother. His mother was inside getting ready to take her son to the House of Miracles to repay St.

Francis for healing his leg. She lifted his robe, and I could see areas of newly healed pink skin on his right leg. It seems that while she was not looking he had turned over a pot of boiling water on his leg. She had asked St. Francis to help heal his leg. When it promptly healed without getting infected, she asked Manuel, who lives just up the street, to carve a small leg for her. He did not charge her anything to carve it.

Izaias, another carver of *milagres* who lives in Canindé, has also been making votive offerings for many years. However he, like Bibi, feels this is a waste of his talent and time. He would not tell me how much he charges for carving an *ex-voto* but did try to sell me for thirty-five *reis* (about $35) a carving of *Nossa Senhora de Fátima*, the patron saint of Portugal who is very popular in Brazil, that he made. The carving was fairly well done, but I declined to purchase it.

Chapter 5

PILGRIMS AND POLITICS

For people living in the *sertão*, every day is a situation of one political negotiation after another. With a binary social system comprising the elites and the masses which has changed little in over four hundred years, most *sertanejos* serve as members of a marginalized labor force of sharecroppers and migrant workers who must continue working under socially manipulated conditions that insure a system of dependency. In this chapter, I will discuss in depth the lives of the pilgrims and the social and political pressures that they must negotiate to survive.

A. The pilgrims

The *sertão* was first occupied by men moving westward looking for land upon which to graze cattle. They established vast plantations, and for about three hundred years this region was thinly populated. When the inevitable droughts occurred, the cattle died but the people survived. In the nineteenth century it was discovered that cotton grew well in this area. Soon there was an influx of migrants arriving from other regions, in hopes of finding work. Today, the population of the *sertão* accounts for forty-six percent of the total population of the Northeast (Mitchell 1981:3). The *fazenda*, the large-scale, privately-owned plantation, is still the predominate form of landholding in Brazil. Owners of these *fazendas* contract land to small-time farmers in a variety of tenure arrangements and harsh negotiations which always result in the owners' favor. In *The Brazilian Peasantry*, Forman (1975) categorizes these peasant farmers three ways. The smallest percentage of peasant farmers are tenant farmers. They pay money for the land upon which they live and work. Sharecropping accounts for about fifteen percent of the small

farming operations. These sharecroppers are in a sense salaried employees who receive land and a percentage of the crop in exchange for labor. They pay their rent in crops (*renda*) or by in-kind labor (*sujeição*) (Johnson 1971). In the 1950s and 60s many of these sharecroppers and tenant farmers were dislocated, prompting a growth of organized peasant leagues. The growth of these leagues allowed the angry farmers strength to vent their feelings. As a result, this was a time of many violent actions between the league members and the hired gunmen of the landowners. Eventually most of the peasant leagues literally died out in the *sertão*. Today, most agricultural workers are working for a daily wage. A few are given a small piece of land to work in their spare time (which is a rare commodity), and some are given lodging. This new system of wage work instead of tenancy has broken down the social system of patronage, leaving the peasant in a worse situation than before. It is reckoned that eighty-one percent of the people whose lives depend upon agriculture are landless laborers (Forman 1975: 42). In a 1970 study by the *Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatistica* (IBGE), it was reported that 20.7 percent of the rural work force earned no cash income at all, that 72.1 percent earned less than minimum wage, and only 7.8 percent of the rural work force earned higher than minimum wage (Dias 1978: 176). Since the landowners still control the land, but have no real investment in their workers, they are less likely to provide as well as or to give the security that the patronage system supplied. This has created a situation of despair for vast numbers of people. In an area where there is often a critical shortage of water, subsistence existence is precarious. The worst drought in recorded history was in 1877-78. It is estimated that 50,000 people died (Mitchell 1981: 3).

There have been several programs financed by the Brazilian government to counteract the effects of the droughts, but they have done little to help the sharecropper or small independent farmer. What they did was reinforce the powers of the wealthy landowners, who spent the money building dams and reservoirs that would benefit

themselves. These funds were so abused, in fact, that this type of aid was popularly referred to as "The Drought Industry." As a result there is a large population that has no resources to fall back on during times of "catastrophic crisis" such as drought-induced famine, or to help endure the more serious "endemic hunger," the chronic famine caused by the poverty which plagues the people of the *sertão*. It is this endemic hunger which is the greater villain (Reis 1981: 42).

The diet of the typical backlander consists primarily of manioc, beans, and *rapadura*, a hard block of coarse brown sugar; all staples that can be purchased very inexpensively. This menu has not varied significantly in over one hundred years. While this diet is adequate in vitamins A and C and carbohydrates when eaten in sufficient quantities, the basic caloric intake and levels of nutrients such as protein, iron, riboflavin and niacin are questionable. Reis states that insufficient caloric intake will cause the body to burn its existing protein for energy, diverting it from its nutritional function. Under these conditions many people will become emaciated, apathetic, and tend to be small in stature. Chronic deficiencies can cause hormonal problems which lead to debilitating diarrhea, delayed puberty, and menstrual irregularity. Niacin, thiamine, and riboflavin deficiencies can cause dermal problems, depression, and irritability. Deficiencies of vitamins A and C can cause more severe conditions. Inadequate ingestion of Vitamin A will cause night blindness and can lead to permanent blindness. Vitamin C in insufficient amounts will cause scurvy. While an adult can more or less be maintained on this diet, the consequences that a child would suffer are quite serious. Because of the important developmental stages occurring during childhood, insufficient caloric intake and nutrients often lead to mental and physical retardation and even death (Reis 1981).

The conditions that Reis suggests aptly describe the physical appearance of many people whom I saw in Canindé. At 5'8" I was taller than most of the men and women with whom I spoke. The fact that many people suffered from wounds that would not heal

properly, skin problems, and brittle bones also illustrates the consequences of chronic malnutrition. These diet insufficiencies could also account for the high number of still-births, weak and sickly infants, and high rate of infant mortality. The average woman in the Northeast has about ten pregnancies during her reproductive years. Out of these pregnancies she will experience 1.4 miscarriages, abortions or stillbirths; have 3.5 of her children die, and have 4.5 living children. Seventy percent of the deaths occur between birth and six months and eighty-two percent by the end of the first year (Scheper-Hughes 1986).

To some extent, this nutritional deficiency also may account for the high rate of illiteracy, which is well over fifty percent in the Northeast and often one hundred percent in rural areas. In the same 1970 study by the IGBE, it was found that only 13.5 % of the rural work force had attended school at all, and only 3.4 % attended for more than three years (Dias 1978: 176) In many cases these rural schools are taught by people only semiliterate themselves and who have no instructional materials with which to work (Forman 1975: 84). Under the best of conditions, children who are hungry cannot concentrate. If they do not have the right foods to eat they can suffer from apathy, anxiety, and depression, none of which are conducive to learning. These conditions also apply to parents. If the parents are full of apathy, anxiety, and depression and do not have the strength to work, they will not encourage their children. It is a vicious circle that has been misdiagnosed by the Brazilian government, which blames ignorance and resistance to change as reason for the *sertanejos*' continued existence in poverty.

This situation of poverty and governmental neglect is not new. According to Mitchell, there has never been a government administration that has "attempted with serious and honest concern to come to grips" with the chronic poverty in the Brazilian Northeast (Mitchell 1981: 4). As a result of this cycle of poverty the Brazilian Northeast has long had a reputation as a region of lawlessness and messianic cults, led by individuals

who have risen out of the fog of apathy and have for a time acted as agents of revitalization. Bandits like Lampião have been immortalized in backland folk tales and *literatura de cordel*, cheaply printed pamphlets telling stories of popular culture. Messianic movements have sprung up all over the Northeast, with promises of Utopia made by charismatic leaders such as Antonio Conselheiro in Canudos and Padre Cicero in Joazeiro. While these movements have for a short time given people hope, they usually are squelched by owners of the *latifundios* (large land-holdings) or are shown to be self-serving and as much a threat as the entrenched social system against which they are supposedly fighting.

Fortunately, there are organizations currently working to help the people of the Northeast. During my stay in Canindé I met a young man who is risking his life trying to better the lives of the disenfranchised farm workers. In my fieldnotes, I wrote, "I met a real hero today, a **real** person." His name is João Cabral, and if he has not been killed by the hired guns of the *coronels* (politically powerful landowners), I am sure he is still working with the *Moveimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais sem Terre* (MST). MST translates to Movement of Rural Workers without Land, and it acts to organize disenfranchised farm workers into a sort of union that will function to break up the monopolies the *coronels* have on the land in Brazil, Bolivia, and Chile. Because of these monopolies, it is impossible for the poor to acquire land, even if it is lying fallow. In many cases the farm workers have lost their position on a *fazenda* and literally have nowhere to go. Organizers like João go to an area and gather the workers and their families into a group. These groups build *acampamentos*, make-shift, self-sufficient, temporary communities on land that is not being used for planting. In most cases, the land is owned by a wealthy *coronel* who is not happy with squatters on his land. The Brazilian papers are full of articles reporting massacres in these encampments by hired guns. Fortunately,

because of the influence of the Church in Canindé, the local group had been on their location for about eighteen weeks without being threatened.

I visited the *acampamento* with one of the *freis*. It was about twenty kilometers from Canindé, but took us about an hour to get there because of the conditions of the dirt roads. There were about eighty-six families living there and they had about two hundred children among them. They lived in makeshift housing comprising two rows of connecting structures made of interwoven twigs. Each family had a section consisting of two rooms, one in front of the other. The two rows faced a central meeting area that had rows of split log benches and a flag pole upon which flew the banner of MST. Knowing how dirty Canindé looked most of the time, and having passed squalid rural homesteads, I had prepared myself for the worst. I was pleasantly surprised that the community was pristine compared to most of the neighborhoods in Canindé. The children were cleaner and looked healthier than the children playing on the streets in town. Each morning these children were gathered in the central meeting area and taught rudimentary lessons in reading and math by members of the community with some education. The adults had planted a garden of corn, beans and potatoes as well as medicinal herbs. The atmosphere in the camp was one of strength and hope. The *frei* stopped at each household, asked after everyone's health, and shook hands with everyone. João Cabral gathered everyone in the meeting area where they sang protest songs and gave impromptu speeches. The *frei* told them that "they were God's special children" and that this movement and their role in it was "God's plan." I was introduced as the *campanheira* from the *Estados Unidos* who had come to learn about the good work they were doing so I could talk about their plight when I returned home. I was very impressed and moved. With the support of the monastery behind the group near Canindé, these eighty-six families will hopefully be allowed to support themselves on this land. It is a start.

Of course, people who are joining MST are just a small percentage of the displaced farm workers. Many have relocated to one of the ever-growing *favelas* of urban communities or have come to shrine centers like Canindé. Della Cava (1970) states that the latter is reflected in the population of Joaseiro, the shrine site for folk saint Padre Cicero, which had increased from 2,500 at the turn of the century to about 80,000 in 1970. I wager it is even larger now.

In such a desperate situation it is only natural that people would turn to religion for help. However, Forman suggests that religion "continue[s] to reaffirm the peasant's dependent social status and to reinforce a 'politics of despair'." He exemplifies this statement by stating that when the majority of Brazilian peasants were finally confronted with the all-important question, "what is to be done," their only audible reply was a fatalistic "as God wills" (Forman 1975: 209-10). Is the church acting as an "opiate" of the people or is it serving as the only means they have of survival? This is a question that I wrestled with during my time in Canindé. The Catholic Church in Brazil is not monolithic, for there are both conservative and progressive factions within it. On one hand, the church in Brazil has served as an agent of change. Many priests have given their lives fighting against federal and local injustice. Priests are still dying for their involvement in MST. Liberation theology, the reconstructive doctrine working towards enacting change for the betterment of the masses, is shared by the *freis* I lived with in Canindé. Yet, on the other hand, the doctrine of the Catholic Church, a doctrine espoused by many clergy, encourages people to accept their lot in life and to simply put their faith in God, assuming that all is a part of the plan God has for them. Is this in the best interest of the people or of the Church? In Canindé, where the Church is all that many people have between them and starvation, I felt I had no right to even ponder the question.

In addition to all the social services provided to the people by the *paróquia* (parish) that I have previously mentioned, one of the *freis* is involved with a *mutirão*, a

cooperative made up displaced people who have come to Canindé. The *mutirão* is working to build housing for themselves on lands donated by the Church. Men, women, and children all work making bricks and doing what labor they can. Men from the community volunteer labor and materials for this project and women volunteer food for the workers.

I have discussed the earthly tangible benefits that people receive from the church, but what about the more spiritual benefits? What draws people to the Church? Forman turns to Brazilian anthropologist Thales de Azevedo for an explanation. Azevedo suggests that religion for the oppressed peasant is of "therapeutic value rather than a path to salvation" (Forman 1975: 275). By this he means that these people turn to religion as a means of satisfying worldly concerns rather than worrying about an afterlife. Over and over I heard pilgrims say, " *vida e luta*," life is struggle. No one I spoke with was concerned with dying and their immortal soul. They were concerned with the here and now. Their focus on living rather than the afterlife is only one way in which these practitioners of folk Catholicism differ from orthodox Roman Catholic dogma. Several social science researchers have written on the differences between orthodox Catholicism and its derivations which usually fall under the umbrella of folk Catholicism (de Kadt 1967; Forman 1975; Foster 1953; Ingham 1986; Yoder 1965, 1974). Basically, there is agreement that there are five points in which folk Catholicism differs from institutional Catholic dogma. The first is, as I mentioned previously, that there is little or no focus on salvation or an afterlife. Secondly, there is a very broad definition of what is considered a sin and what is not. Thirdly, there is an indifference towards the sacraments and the authority of the priest. Fourth, there is an adherence to the cult of saints. Lastly, there is a preference for domestic liturgies rather than formal rites.

These five points can be directly applied to the religion of the pilgrims I spoke with in Canindé. One hundred percent of the people I spoke with had come to St. Francis with

concerns over illness, pain, homelessness, or anxiety about their situation here on earth. They vowed to pay their promise when St. Francis helped them with the suffering they were experiencing. I spoke with a woman who had brought in an *ex-voto* which was a shoe box that she had fashioned into a house. On the shoe box/house she had written her own house number and had written "*Vila da Paz* (House of Peace). I asked her what this signified. She told me that her husband was out of work and drank too much cachaça. When he got drunk he would beat her. She had appealed to St. Francis to help her. Soon afterwards her husband had quit drinking, quit beating her, and had found a job. She said that, *"gracas a Deus e São Francisco"* now she lived in a house of peace.

The second point is that there is a broader definition of what actions might be considered sinful in folk Catholicism than in orthodoxy. In times of war, certain social structures break down and survival is all that matters. In a sense, people in the *sertão* are in a perpetual war zone and the battle is living until the next day. In this battle they may have to lie and even steal, but no one condemns them for it. In some cases they are even rewarded for their actions. Petty pilfering of food, white lies to cover up missing items, even children born out of wedlock are normal occurrences, the casualties and spoils of war.

I have made many references to the anticlerical views of the *sertanejos*. The indifference to priestly role and authority, the adherence to saints, and the preference for domestic liturgies over formal liturgical rites, can all be discussed together. Many times I have heard the *freis* speak about how the pilgrims go to the House of Miracles to repay their promises but do not attend Mass. In many cases, the pilgrims see priests in a service role to the Church but doing nothing for them. They do not need them to intercede in a contract with St. Francis. St. Francis acts as their emissary to God, so what do they need a priest for? The *ex-voto* ritual is not recognized by Roman Catholic liturgy as an official sacred rite of the Church, yet it is the most practiced ritual in Brazilian folk Catholicism.

Many times priests are not present in remote rural areas to perform baptisms, marriage ceremonies, or give last rites. Instead, the families do without these rituals or must perform these rites themselves. Because they have never been indoctrinated into these traditions, the rites have no place in their lives. The *freis* in Canindé are trying to remedy this situation by traveling out into the backlands to say Mass, hear confession, and give Communion, as well as to perform weddings, baptisms, and funerals. At the shrine, there are usually two priests in the confession booths in the House of Miracles, yet they are rarely busy. It seems that most people come to Canindé to repay or renew a contract with St. Francis. The formal dogma of the Church is just not necessary. Instead, what is important to them is fulfilling the contract with St. Francis. Pilgrims rely on St. Francis to ameliorate difficulties in their lives, and he gives them what they need. He heals their physical and mental aches and pains.

The idea that body knowledge and manifestation of illness can be socially constructed has been cross-culturally explored by many researchers (Jackson 1989; Lock 1993; Martin 1987; Ngokwey 1995; Rebhun 1993; Scheper-Hughes 1992). In *Death without Weeping*, Scheper-Hughes discusses how pressures from the social and political system faced by the typical *Nordestino* (Northeasterner) influence and are revealed in his/her physical afflictions. Basing her discussion on Marcel Mauss's idea of "habitus," a term later made popular by Pierre Bourdieu, as the way people "inhabit" their bodies, Scheper-Hughes looks at the somatization of the typical Northeasterner. This investigation brings into consideration the activities of "working, eating, grooming, resting and sleeping, having sex, getting sick and getting well." She maintains that these are all "forms of body praxis and expressive of dynamic social, cultural, and political relations" (Scheper-Hughes 1992: 185). In other words, everything we do, even mundane activities, has been consciously or unconsciously influenced by culture and the way these activities are manifested in the body reveals socially encoded statements about that culture.

Taking this line of thinking a step farther, Scheper-Hughes turns to French phenomenologist Luc Boltanski, who proposed that because the poor and working classes spend their days doing physical labor, they will communicate primarily with and through the body. On the other hand, the upper classes are more disassociated from their bodies because their work is more of the mind. As a result, they express personal and social "dis-ease" psychologically rather than in the physically manifested way of the poor (Scheper-Hughes 1992: 185).

During the week of the *Romaria*, with the help of four assistants I polled three hundred people about their pilgrimage to Canindé. During the previous months I had talked with at least that many or more. Looking back over the questionnaires and the interviews with the pilgrims, I notice time and time again where people describe afflictions that have manifested in the body, with symptoms that could be interpreted as socially mandated. Tremors, loss of voice, spontaneous blindness, pain in arms, paralysis, a hand curled into a fist, and a chronic nervous condition can all reflect the internal manifestation of rage and frustration that must be endured by a subordinated people. This rage and frustration springs from what Brazilian philosopher Paulo Freire has defined as the "culture of silence" which exists between the "subordinate and superordinate sectors of the social system." He says that in the culture of silence "[t]o exist is only to live. The body carries out orders from above. Thinking is difficult, speaking the word is forbidden" (Forman 1975: 207). In this sort of situation where thinking will only bring on more frustration, where speaking out is forbidden, where does rage, or for that matter any emotion, have to go but to turn inwards? You want to talk back, but you cannot, so the voice disappears. You cannot look at instances of injustice anymore, so your vision spontaneously disappears. When you long to raise your arms against your employer but cannot, paralysis sets in. The list goes on and on. Out of three hundred questionnaires, there were only fifty-five people who had cuts or broken bones (Figure 11). While the

situations in which these people were injured might be indirectly related to a social problem, these were physical problems with inarguably physical causation. In addition to these fifty-five, two men had been shot due to alcohol-related fights, and one woman said that she was crazy and when pressed further said that she drank too much. These alcohol-related problems could also be indirectly tied to social dis-ease. The two hundred and forty-two other people we interviewed with the questionnaires all had problems that might be directly construed as socially related. Thirty-two people said they had the vague affliction of tumors, fifty people said they had rashes, thirty-nine people complained of headaches, twenty-four people had recovered from temporary paralysis, twenty-five people had problems with their heart or other internal organs, ten people complained of *nervoso*, and the sixty-two remaining suffered from female reproductive problems and other disabilities.

Other demographics that we gleaned from the questionnaires were that the largest percentage of pilgrims were female. We interviewed two hundred and twelve women and eighty-eight men (Figure 12). While this finding might reflect a greater willingness of women to answer our questions, the margin of difference reflects that more women enter into contracts with St. Francis than do men. I can verify this percentage from my own experience. I spent every day for six months at the shrine and on a daily basis saw more women there than men. Within a subordinate population, no one has a voice against the dominant population. But within the subordinate population everyone is still not equal. Brazil is a patriarchy. Men hold title to property, and tenancy and sharecropping are negotiated through the males of the family. I spoke with at least two women whose husbands had died and who had been told that they must move off the owner's land. Both women had nowhere else to go and faced homelessness. In both cases they appealed to St. Francis, and they were able to find other accommodations.

Brazilian men are dominant in their households. Women who voice their opinions are likely to be beaten or even abandoned. Men living in or near a community get to release frustration in bars and by playing and watching *futebol* (soccer). Women have no such outlet. Women who work outside the home are almost always in domestic service in someone else's home. This occupational category had the largest representation for women on the questionnaire (Figure 13). The typical woman has to get up very early to take care of the needs of those in her household and then spends the day taking care of the needs of another woman's household. When she goes home, there is still her own work to complete. Most domestics have only one afternoon off a week. Because of this, the childhood of females ends early. Older sisters often are charged with the care of younger siblings. It is not unusual to see a girl the age of seven or eight carrying a younger sister or brother on her hip walking through Canindé. When families live in rural areas, labor is hard for everyone and the stresses are even more intense. However, urban or rural, women are still subordinate to their husbands. With no autonomy of any kind, it stands to reason that they are likely to have more physically manifested symptoms than men. It also makes sense that they would turn to St. Francis to hear their plea. Here in the spiritual realm they can get the relief of voicing their problems without fearing any sort of repercussion.

With respect to the category of age, one third of the pilgrims that we interviewed were over fifty (Figure 14). This number is not surprising. In most cultures older generations adhere most closely to religious practices. When this age category is compared to the occupational category some interesting facts can be learned. Even though unemployment rates are very high in this region of Brazil, one third of the people we spoke with were over fifty years old, and only twenty-six of these people stated that they were retired. While sixty-two people did say they were unemployed, many of them were women who did not work outside the home. Many of the women who were fifty and over

were employed as domestics. Fifty of the eighty-eight men who spoke with us were working in agriculture. Ten of the twenty-nine people under the age of twenty stated that they were students. The remaining seventy-five people came from other occupations. The largest portion of these were carpenters, although one was a *vaqueiro* (who brought a *milagre* in the shape of a horse's hoof). There were a few people with white collar occupations, such as teachers, a nurse, several waiters, two municipal officials, and a policeman.

Half of the people whom we interviewed had come to Canindé to repay St. Francis more than four times (Figure 15). When we asked them why they asked St. Francis for help, some of the responses were: "He is my protector," "He can work miracles," "I believe in his miracles," "Because I love him," "To obtain a cure," and "God gave him power to make miracles."

Even though the followers of St. Francis pray directly to him, they do not forget the hierarchical power of God. It is just that God is so powerful, and according to their worldview, he does not have time to listen to someone as small and insignificant as s/he is. St. Francis, however, does listen and does love them, and acts as their emissary. They believe that with God's will, he can perform the miracles they ask. Many times people will say *"Gracas a Deus e São Francisco"* when depositing their *ex-voto*. Reference to the Holy Trinity used in the formal Church liturgy is missing from all the conversations I had with pilgrims. In fact there is a joke that in the *sertão* that the Holy Trinity is not the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, but instead is *São Francisco, Deus, e Padre Cicero*.

B. The politics of religion and culture

There is a long-standing animosity between the Franciscan fathers as representatives of the Catholic Church and the elected officials of Canindé as representatives of the State.

Presently, the Church has a monopoly on the income generated in Canindé. They control all the land, they limit the number and types of tourism-related businesses, and for many years they also manipulated the city government. Those times may now be coming to an end. As I mentioned previously, a new type of politician, backed by disgruntled business owners, is challenging the dominant voice of the Church. An election occurred during the time I was in Canindé. The candidates were all competing for votes. It was not uncommon to hear that a particular candidate had bought votes in exchange for helping this or that person, by paying for a medical procedure, or by purchasing someone a new television, or the like. One candidate, particularly disliked by the *freis*, chartered several *pau de araras* to go through the countryside and pick up people to bring to Canindé to pay their promises to St. Francis in exchange for getting their vote. This man won the election. The political atmosphere in Canindé is emotionally charged and the citizens are caught in the middle. Their uneasiness is reflected in the dream of Jetulio which predicted the apocalypse of Canindé. The apex of the conflict between Church and State occurred before I arrived in Canindé, but I was told of this incident by several people, and it has become a much repeated tale. I do not know what is fact and what has become embroidered as fact through time. It seems that during a Mass, one of the town officials and the head of the monastery got into an argument in the back of the sanctuary because the *frei* had taken offense at the official smoking a cigarette in the Basilica. One thing led to another until the two were yelling at each other and disrupting the Mass. Another *frei* who was conducting the Mass is reported to have yelled from the altar," *Na rua, cachorros*" (Take it to the street, [you] dogs). After that, most civil relations between the Church and State broke down.

The *frei* who told them to take it to the street is not a native Brazilian. He seems to devote one hundred percent of his energy to the people. He set up the day care centers. He arranged for the land to be given to the *mutirão* and has actually worked side by side

with the laborers. He walks through the *barros* asking after the elderly and the sick. He even stops and speaks with the prostitutes, inviting them to come to Mass. While I was in Canindé, he arranged for the use of a *pau de arara* to take some of the residents of the poorest barros on a pilgrimage to Joaseiro to visit the shrine dedicated to Padre Cicero. Most importantly, instead of comfortably riding in the cab, he rode for the three day journey, in the back of the truck with them. He has in the past few years become the director of the *Romaria* and has given it back to the people. In the past activities such as carrying the statue of St. Francis through the streets were used as political forums or political rewards, now this honor is given to men who work hard in the *barros*. No longer can political candidates put campaign posters up in the House of Miracles. He has forbidden it. To the poor people of Canindé and the surrounding area, he is a hero. He has taken a stand against both the State and the Church hierarchies on their behalf. Unfortunately, as a result, his popularity is limited to the population he serves. When I spoke to local business owners about the *freis*, I learned that they preferred all other priests to him. They said he has no sense of humor, that he never smiles. Conversely, it is interesting, this priest feels that when pilgrims come to Canindé, they are often "taken advantage of and financially cheated" by some of the people in the city. I also learned that because he does put the interests of the poor first, before those of the diocese, he has been threatened with removal from Canindé by the bishop in Fortaleza.

The attitude that the diocese has towards this *frei* illustrates the gap between the orthodox Catholic dogma and the religion of the people. The fact that in religious and academic literature forms of religion such as those practiced by the people of Northeast Brazil which deviate from the orthodox practice are separately labeled "folk Catholicism" only reinforces this gap. In Brazil, the followers of St. Francis of Wounds in Canindé or Padre Cicero in Joaseiro, saints who are not canonized by the Pope in Rome, are called members of *cultos*, cults. This term is also used to describe Afro-Brazilian religions such

as Candomblé and Umbanda. Interestingly, while the recognized form of Roman Catholicism maintains the "power" of the Church, members of the folk branches far outnumber those who are orthodox. In an interview with one of the priests, he said:

> "There is this difference between the official church and the church of the people. They are different and they aren't different. They are very different in one sense. Our language, ecclesiastical, is very high for the people who come here. Our prayers are very different from what they like and feel toward God and the community where they live. We don't have the capacity yet to enter into the spirit or sentiments of these people. We have made much progress, but there is still much difference."

The tradition of *ex-votos* is outside orthodox praxis. To reinforce this, all shrine sites have a designated area outside the "sacred" areas of the sanctuary and the main altars. In many places it is a niche off to the side of the sanctuary as in San Xavier del Bac in Tucson. Sometimes it is a small room off the sanctuary as in the *Santuario de Chimayo* in Chimayo, New Mexico. In Canindé, votives are placed in the House of Miracles, a building entirely separated from the Basilica. The paying of the promise is the most important activity for the pilgrims who come to Canindé. This is reflected in the huge numbers that visit the House of Miracles as compared to the smaller numbers who attend Mass or go to confession. Yet, the church places more sacred importance on the Basilica. In an article on "empowering place," Margaret Rodman discusses the importance of "multilocality." She states that much research has been written about the importance of multivocality and suggests that the concept of place should also be examined. She goes on to say that "place, like voice and time, is a politicized social and cultural construct" and by giving it attention it can "encourage the understanding of the complex social construction of spatial meaning" (Rodman 1992: 640). The hegemonic views of the

Catholic Church in Canindé are not the same as the worldview of the subordinate population it serves. Though there are many church officials who are trying to bridge the gap, their work is often thwarted by the hierarchical authorities, who have no direct contact with the people. The Church authorities did try to address its problems in relating to its membership with changes that came about as a result of the Second Vatican Council (Vatican II) which met from 1962-65. Problems arising with the liturgical language were somewhat alleviated when Mass was no longer spoken in Latin, Bible study was encouraged, and a sharing of responsibility for the Church community was encouraged between priest and laity (Mainwaring 1986: 43-44).

Even so, the practitioners of the Northeast still have spiritual allegiances outside the Catholic mainstream. The generic ideologies in Afro-Brazilian based religions and the folk form of Catholicism practiced in Canindé are not so divergent as one might assume. There are fluid boundaries across which people move often making it unclear where folk Catholicism begins and ends in relation to Afro-Brazilian religions such as Candomblé and Umbanda. Both are focused on life on earth rather than an afterlife. Both employ a pantheon of intermediaries in the form of saints or spirits to act on humanity's behalf. In fact, in Brazil the same statuary is used to represent Catholic saints and Afro-Brazilian deities. Both of these pantheons center on the belief of miraculous powers which can cure illness and answer petitions. Both of these religious movements are located or had their beginnings in rural areas and cater to a subordinate population (Brown and Bick 1987). Perhaps these similarities are the reason that these Brazilians often blend practices of what an outsider might view as more than one religion at a time into their ideal form of worship.

When I was formulating my research questions, initially I was concerned with the commodification of the *ex-votos* similar to the commodification of the religious objects of African and other indigenous peoples. I knew from a pre-fieldwork visit to Canindé that the bulk of the *ex-votos* was destroyed. But from this same visit I knew that academics

and other religious personnel were allowed to take the *ex-votos* of their choice. In addition, I had read of international collections of Brazilian *ex-votos* owned by both individuals and museums, and I questioned how the people who offered these *ex-votos* felt about this. Their offerings had been made to repay a private contract between St. Francis and themselves. The *ex-votos* were fashioned with the idea that they were going to have a temporal life, not sit on a shelf as an art object. I wondered when the contract was fulfilled, if the practitioners felt that the objects were sacred and if so, when or how they were activated or consecrated and also when and how they were de-activated or de-consecrated?

To a person, no one told me that they felt the *ex-votos* were sacred. They all felt that the *promessa*, the contract, was the sacred thing. Everyone said that the contract was fulfilled after the *ex-voto* was placed in the bin. My questions regarding consecration or de-consecration, activation or de-activation were notions that I either did not have the vocabulary to properly explain, or were ideas alien to them. I could only infer from their other statements and actions that they felt the *ex-voto* was activated and fulfilled their contract with St. Francis, as it was created or personalized by them. It was then de-activated, or symbolically depleted of personal meaning, upon placement in the bin in the House of Miracles. I wonder if I had possessed a better grasp of the subtleties of the language, if a word other than "sacred" might have elicited a different response.

The other person who seemed bothered by the phenomenon of commodification, or at least the removal of the *ex-votos* from the House of Miracles, was one of the *freis*. Many of the other *freis* in Canindé and those in other monasteries in the Northeast have personal collections of *ex-votos*. Some collect ones made from a particular substance like bee's wax or stone. Others have a particular body part that they collect. During the *Romaria*, religious personnel from all over Brazil come to stay at the monastery to assist the local clerics with the additional duties created by the influx of hundreds of pilgrims.

Many of those visiting priests culled through the bins, in the presence of the pilgrims, and took armfuls of *ex-votos* for their collections. I remember one priest had chosen so many that he could not carry them and took a pilgrimage robe worn by a recent pilgrim out of the bin and fashioned a sack out of it to carry all his *ex-votos* back to the monastery. When a local priest heard of this from one of the docents, he was furious and told them not to let any of the visiting priests take any more of the *ex-votos*. Of course, this was not really possible, for the docents felt that they could not tell priests that they could not do something. I asked this priest what his feelings regarding the *ex-voto* tradition were, and he said that "When he [a pilgrim] gives an *ex-voto* like a head, hand, breast, or leg, he is giving something from his life. He can't cut his own hand off and give it to God, so he makes a hand and presents it to God." While I am not sure that is exactly the feeling of the pilgrims, at least this priest recognizes the important religious value encoded in the *ex-votos* and wants to keep them for the people. He is interested in breathing new life into the small museum run by the church that is adjacent to the monastery. Until 1996, there had been no new artifacts put in the museum since 1969. With the thousands of incredible *milagres* that are offered each year, no one had been sufficiently interested in them to keep any to put in the museum for the benefit of the pilgrims. The priest wanted that to change and requested that the docents select special pieces so they could be placed in the museum.

The museum is a series of large dark rooms in a building behind the monastery. I doubt that the church spends very much on its upkeep, because the artifacts look pretty tired. The museum has no climate control, which is not surprising. As a result, most of the artifacts are in various stages of decay. Actually, the lack of light and the fact that most of these items have not been touched in twenty years are the only things that have allowed them to remain intact, such as they are. The first item that greets a visitor to the museum is the *Meninha da Amazonas*, the life-size doll from the legend. The first room is

filled with the bell from the first *Santuário*, and various high-style wooden religious icons in various states of decay. All of the artifacts in all of the rooms are simply displayed on shelves. Visitors are supposed to stand behind stanchioned chains when looking at the exhibits. In the next room are indigenous artifacts collected by a German missionary who traveled the Amazon region many years ago on a motorcycle. The room exhibits include baskets, arrows, feather capes and necklaces, all suffering from dry rot, and his motorcycle. In one corner of this same room is the gun and a few other possessions of the infamous bandit of the *sertão*, Lampião. Finally, visitors come to a larger room where the walls are covered with *ex-votos*. There is no label copy, but the *ex-votos* speak for themselves. There are examples from all genres, materials, and artistic styles. Around the room are crosses that have been carried to Canindé from all over the Northeast. There are huge rocks that have been carried by pilgrims walking to Canindé. In the center of the room are small model wooden boats. The stories these boats tell are another testament to the faith and the family of St. Francis. Maria Édite, the manager of the museum, told me their story. These boats come from the Amazon, where rubber production takes place. The rubber workers cannot make the journey to Canindé, because it is too far. When they make a contract with St. Francis, they have come up with an ingenious method of paying their *promessa*. They write or get someone to write a note to St. Francis thanking him for interceding for them. Then they take the paper and wrap it in layers of latex from the rubber tree until they have a ball about five inches wide. Then they make a little boat, enclose the ball inside the boat so that it won't get wet, and set the boat floating from the nearest *igarapés* (bank of narrow tributaries). On the outside of the boat are painted words to the effect of "This is a *milagre* for the *promessa* to St. Francis." When people see these boats, they know what it means. If they see it stuck along the shoreline, they will set it back into the flowing water until the boat winds up at the end of the waterway. Then the boat is given to a trucker who is driving on the huge highways out of the center

of the country. The boat is passed from one trucker to the next until it ends up being deposited in the House of Miracles by someone. I realize this is a fantastic story, but this is what I was told, and there are three or four examples of these boats in the museum.

The rest of the museum is made up of exhibits of objects donated to the museum by followers of St. Francis such as huge fruits and vegetables, mineral specimens, hornet's nests, and paintings and sculptures made by pilgrims honoring St. Francis.

I do not think there are many visitors to the museum. There is a small charge, and I fear that with competition from the zoo and the local bars, going to the museum loses out. Perhaps this means that people have no interest in seeing the legacy of *ex-votos.* Maybe the concept of a museum is too alien for them. Or perhaps, because the *freis* feel that there are more important areas in which to direct their energy, the exhibit is tired and dusty thus reinforcing the lack of respect the Church has for the tradition, and because of this visitors are not drawn to it. Hopefully, some of the local priests and others like them can change that.

São Francisco das Chagas is the patron saint of the subordinate population of the Northeast. However, he is not necessarily the patron saint of the dominant class of people of the Northeast. Stephen Gudeman suggests that "the meaning of any saint lies not only in what it represents and who venerates it but also in what it is not and who does not venerate it" (Gudeman 1976: 711). St. Francis of Wounds represents poverty, devotion, and physical pain. He is venerated by the subaltern, people to whom life is a struggle. Very few people in Brazil who do not live this way want to be reminded that there are people who do. Brazilian people are very image conscious. To worship a saint who is connected with poverty, especially one like St. Francis who was born wealthy and gave all his wealth away, is not someone to whom they can relate. Many upper class Brazilians prefer to accept the philosophy of the government that says the impoverished people in the Northeast are ignorant and refuse to accept change. As a result, these upper class

Brazilians believe the *culto* of St. Francis and the tradition of *ex-votos* connected with it is just superstition and not something to be taken seriously. For example, the first time I visited Brazil, I stayed with a wonderful family. They lived a comfortable life, had a vacation home at one of the pristine beaches, went to Mass every Sunday, and they could not figure out for the life of them why I was interested in *ex-votos*.

Dr. Barreto, trained in anthropology at the French University of Lyon, and a highly respected professor of Social Medicine and Psychiatry at the Federal University in Fortaleza, has been studying the *ex-voto* tradition and inventorying the votive offerings for about fifteen years. He has an added interest and a unique understanding of the tradition from having grown up in Canindé. Even though his work and its application to the study of community health has been widely quoted in Brazilian and international newspapers and journals, and he has presented papers at international conferences on his research, the university has yet to fund any extensive study of the *ex-votos*. The university adheres to the "received view" that the *ex-votos* are nothing but the work of superstitious, naive people and as such are not worthy subject matter for scientific research. I, too, met with skepticism regarding the importance of this research and was turned down by all the major anthropological funding organizations when trying to find financial support for my fieldwork. Hopefully, Dr. Barreto and I will be able to publish collaboratively, and in so doing find means of funding to further research in this vital field.

Chapter 6

CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter I will re-address points made throughout this work in order to summarize and append information relating to the *ex-voto* tradition as practiced in Canindé, the cultural construction of physical disease and social dis-ease, and the politics of a widely shared, yet nonetheless contested cultural concept and cultural history. I will also touch upon topics and concepts that I will explore in the future to generate cross-cultural research in the field of *ex-votos* as well as complementary areas such as self-healing and healing through art forms.

My research goals of documenting the *ex-voto* tradition, looking for the roles it plays in the lives of its practitioners, and discovering what the *ex-votos* themselves could convey regarding the social dis-ease in northeast Brazil were greatly facilitated by following interpretive models set by Geertz and those of researchers who built upon his work such as Sider, Burawoy, and Rosaldo. By using material culture as a touch stone, I used Geertz's concept of "thick description" to read how these objects were emblematic of not only physical disease but social dis-ease as well. I found that the catalog of physical disease illustrated by the *ex-votos* could all be traced to the root problem of poverty. By investigating historical patterns of social modality and combining them with resulting economic issues, over space and time, as suggested by the works of Sider, Burawoy, and Rosaldo, it became evident that culture is constructed and must be negotiated differently depending upon one's place in it. The marginalized people who are followers of St. Francis have constructed a culture in which they maximize the realization of their needs. It is a culture that is negotiated in such a way that has its own visual language, commentary, and even costume. To be able to understand this culture, I listened to the

pilgrim's stories and observed their ritual and commonplace behavior. To situate this information within the bigger picture of the Brazilian Northeast I also listened to the stories of religious personnel and other members of the community and surrounding area. From these "micro" data I was able to make the "macro" statements found within this document regarding the tradition of *ex-votos* and the people who practice it.

It stands to reason that culture is constructed, that disease is culturally constructed as well, as is maintained by Scheper-Hughes (1992), Jackson (1989), and Lock (1993), among others. It also stands to reason that treatment for culturally constructed disease would be constructed in a like fashion. Many of the diseases and afflictions from which the pilgrims in Canindé suffer, result from frustration and the cycle of poverty and in which they live. Conditions of malnutrition and chronic gastro-intestinal problems can be directly traced to lack of sufficient nutrients, potable water, and sanitation facilities. These situations could be corrected by the governmental services to which all Brazilian citizens have a right; however, the rights of these people have been neglected. In addition to those physical symptoms manifested by social neglect, many people also suffer from culturally mediated conditions such as *susto*, *empacho*, *encosto*, and *nervoso* which are limited for the most part to members of the subordinate class. These culture-bound conditions are often called folk illnesses and can be divided into two types: material illnesses, types of physical illness resulting from objective causation, and spiritual illnesses, which are physical illnesses which have subjective causation (Ngokwey 1995). While *empacho*, a blockage or type of digestive problem, can be categorized as a material illness due to its material or natural causation such as lack of sanitation, *susto*, *encosto*, and *nervoso* are designated as spiritual illnesses because the causation is subjective and often culturally mediated. *Susto* is a condition that its sufferers feel is brought on by a sudden shock or frightening experience. *Encosto*, from the verb *encostar* meaning to lean, is a physical state resulting from being "leaned upon" by a spiritual entity. *Nervoso* is a generic term

used to describe nervous conditions resulting from a variety of origins. These conditions result from prolonged periods of fear, frustration, and anxiety in which most of the subaltern of the Northeast live. These culturally specific maladies are somatized by depression, lack of energy, chronic headaches, bodily pains, and fragile nervous states for which medical personnel can find no objective basis. This often results in a minimizing of the patient's complaint by the health care worker. This in turn reinforces the anxiety of the sufferer, who feels further negated by the dominant culture through the doctor's inability to see and recognize her/his pain. For this reason, it is my opinion that people who are members of the culture of the oppressed in the Northeast "constructed" St. Francis of Wounds to heal their diseases. It is their belief that St. Francis can bring forth an easing of their condition because he listens to their problems and can see their pain. By finally being seen, the pilgrim's suffering is validated, and through a *milagre* their affliction disappears. The *ex-votos* that pilgrims create to fulfill their contract with St. Francis are encoded with symbols depicting conditions of disease caused by the socially created environment of neglect in which they exist. These symbols can be read by like individuals, and the messages they send provide visual proof of St. Francis' devotion and as such reinforce group solidarity and reciprocity. In this manner, the *ex-votos* serve the therapeutic function of allowing these unfortunate people a way to vent their anger and "voice" their frustration without fear of recrimination by the dominant class.

When building upon Geertz's (1973) statement that people within a culture exist in a web of shared cultural significance, Sider (1994) suggested that some people are the spiders who weave the web and the other people are the living things caught in the web. The pilgrims who turn to St. Francis for help are, in 99% of the cases, certainly not the spiders, but are in most cases left to the mercy of those spiders, who will decide if their fate is to be eaten or just left dangling in their web.

Discussions of Brazil's bimodal population, the culture of the "spinners of the web" and the "victims caught in the web," have generated many volumes of research. The "mosaic" components of the Brazilian population, the Native American, African, and European, are openly discussed and even celebrated. Yet, when the history of Brazil has been written, representation of the individual stories of this diverse population have not been reflected in the text (Skidmore 1985). It would seem that to the writers of Brazilian history there is but one history that is shared by all people. I would beg to differ and co-opt the terms utilized by Sider: it is the spider's history that is told, while the history of the victims is consumed and forgotten. A comment made by one of the *freis* about the information I was gathering from the pilgrims illustrates this point. He said:

> "All of the information that you are collecting here from the people is of great value to us. The more material that exists about our people, the better the story is created. All this material is the story of our people. It is sad that our Latin American people never had a continuous story. The whites did, but because of the conquests of the lands, our story was brutally interrupted. It is very sad to see that. Our people still have to suffer because of that. A people without a history are a lost people."

Due to situations that have been out of oppressed people's control, histories of the subaltern of Brazil's Northeast have been lost or forgotten. In order to find work, families have been forced to migrate to different areas of the country. Because of illiteracy, the family ties that might be kept through written correspondence are unavailable, and eventually contact is lost. With this loss go family history and generational information that we in the United States take for granted. When I questioned people about ancestry, many could not tell me any information. Several did not know the names of their grandparents or where their previous generations had lived. Because in many cases these

people have no link to history through family or through a shared culture with the dominant class, they forge new alliances in the present. This communitas has been found in, what is labeled by Dr. Barreto, the "nation of St. Francis." Membership in this group gives them a shared ideology, a recognizable uniform, guaranteed acceptance that is transferable to many different locations, and a shared history or mythology.

The ideology of the "nation of St. Francis" is replete with its own heroes and legends which are separate from institutional Catholic liturgy, beginning with parallel versions of the creation of the shrine complex and the miracles surrounding the construction of the first cathedral. Their insistence on calling the saint St. Francis of Wounds, rather than his ecclesiastical name of St. Francis of Assisi, further reinforces their autonomy from clerical authority. In the same vein, while the followers of St. Francis do revere the holy icons of the Church, they also create icons of their own, such as the crosses that are carried by *Homens do Crux*. In many ways, these crosses and certain notable *ex-votos* such as the *Criança* and the *Meninha* are more important icons to the people because they are of their own making. These are objects that are approachable and available to them, unlike the ornate emblems of the Church which are kept behind protective barriers and brought out to the people once a year. This cadre of symbols, because they are created by the practitioners, can be added to spontaneously. In this way they serve as objects of revitalization which can stimulate the vitality of their faith. The *ex-voto* tradition and these other factors serve to create a religion of the people that effectively bypasses clerical intervention and satisfies their needs.

Because of the acceptance of individualistic interpretation among the practitioners of this belief system and its similarity and compatibility with other belief systems in Brazil, I wonder if saying that Brazil is a country of heterodox beliefs is truly accurate. This tradition of folk Catholicism shares many characteristics with other belief systems in Brazil which fall under the label of folk religions. The Afro-Brazilian belief systems of

Candomblé and Umbanda, as well as Spiritism, which is based on the French philosophy of Allan Kardec, are similar to folk Catholicism in that they are based upon a pantheon of deities rather than a single omnipotent presence. The tenets of each of these systems seek amelioration of earthly problems rather than focusing on an afterlife. Also, each of these belief systems relies on magical or miraculous outcomes to achieve its goals. Because there has been such a sharing or even blending of ritual behavior among these practices, and more importantly because many devotees feel free to pass to and from one practice or another in order to achieve their goals, why must we, as outside researchers, feel that we must differentiate the belief systems of these people into separate categories? If I learned anything during my time in Canindé, it is that the spiritual beliefs of these people are not kept in a little box that is kept separate from the rest of their lives. I realized that my idea of devout behavior, where one is quiet and meditative, does exist, but is not the defining characteristic of religious practice as it is found in Northeast Brazil. I saw that people can be devout even while laughing or smoking a cigarette performing the religious act of walking the Stations of the Cross. Puritanical parameters which impacted behavior models in North America are not observable in the backlands of Brazil. People there tend to be more spontaneous and thus more open to anything that would be pleasurable or beneficial in some way. This openness carries over into their faith. These people are trying to make their existence more bearable and will explore anything within their means to achieve this goal. Because of this, they appeal to several deities but feel no contradiction of faith by so doing. In other words, to say that someone is a Catholic, an Umbandist, or a Spiritist is far too restrictive for the faith practiced by the people I met in Northeast Brazil. These words "Catholic," "Umbanda," or "Spiritism," are just labels, while faith and beliefs are practices and as such cannot be restrained or limited by such words. Perhaps, it is better for these groups to be seen by their oppressors as several separate groups. A too-unified front might be seen as threatening to the dominant

populace. As it is, these religions are usually deemed harmless by the powers that be, and as such they allow a type of freedom that is much needed as a release valve by the poor of Northeast Brazil.

Ecstatic behavior is another characteristic that is shared by these faiths. In all of the belief systems I have mentioned, with the exception of folk Catholicism, ritual practice includes trance behavior on the part of the participants. However, the Masses that I attended in Canindé were far more exuberant than traditional Masses that I have attended elsewhere. In Canindé the services were more akin to a Pentecostal revival found in the Southern Appalachian region of the United States than a Catholic Mass. Many times the service sounded almost like a political rally, as the priest would stir the congregation's emotions by encouraging them to scream over and over "*Viva São Francisco*" until there was an electric current running through the Basilica. Both of these ceremonies, those which result in trance behavior and the Catholic Masses in Canindé, allow their practitioners to release tension and stress through physical catharsis. This is of much therapeutic value to a people whose normal behavior is inhibited to meet a standard set by the dominant class.

There are also therapeutic benefits to be found in the creation of an *ex-voto* to St. Francis. The autonomous contract negotiated between a pilgrim and St. Francis is in itself beneficial for the reassurance it gives that s/he has a benefactor upon which to call in times of need. The payment of the promise with the *ex-voto* reinforces a sense of self-worth in being able to fulfill a contract, if only a spiritual one. But, I thought that the crafting of the actual artifact would have the most therapeutic potential. In the crafting of an image of one's affliction, the pouring of emotion into that object, time is allowed for pondering the problem, celebrating its resolution, and the cathartic release of it into a tangible symbol which can then literally be cast away. The people with whom I spoke that made their own *ex-voto* reinforced this sentiment. Interestingly, however, contrary to this strong cathartic

potential, of the 300 people who participated in the survey, only forty-two pilgrims made their own *ex-votos*. Everyone else asked a friend, relative, or professional wood worker to make their *ex-votos* for them, and about half of the pilgrims paid for this service. Perhaps it was my own bias, that of a former art student, that made me focus on artistic catharsis. Perhaps it was my perception that the *ex-votos* should be considered sacred artifacts. From the beginning, pilgrims contradicted this assumption and told me that it was not the *ex-voto* that was sacred, but that the contract with St. Francis was. These statements are reinforced by the statistics. About half of the 300 pilgrims we questioned had been to Canindé more that four times to fulfill a *promessa*. These people believe very devoutly in the power of a contract with St. Francis. However, they apparently do not think it matters if they make the payment with their own hands. Simply put, it is the contract which is sacred to them; the method of payment is not.

Much has been written about artifacts that are crafted during healing rituals. Wooden figures such as the *bocio* carved by the Fon in Benin (Blier 1995), *minkisi* carved by the Bakongo in Zaire (MacGaffey 1991,1993), *mbwoolu* made by the Yaka, also in Zaire (Devisch 1990), *nuchus* carved by the Cuna in the San Blas Islands (Taussig 1993), the painted seals, scrolls and talismans of the Ethiopian *tebab* (Mercier 1997), and the sand paintings of the Navajo in the Southwestern United States (Newcomb 1964) are only a few of the many examples of how art is used in healing throughout the world. In these traditions a religious or artistic specialist is charged with the creation of these objects. In some cases another specialist is enlisted to "activate" the power of the object. In the case of the Brazilian *ex-votos*, it is the pilgrim who activates her/his own *ex-voto* even if s/he is not the actual creator. The pilgrims feel that their *ex-votos* are "de-activated" when they are placed in the *ex-voto* bin in the House of Miracles. When another pilgrim recycles an *ex-voto* from the bin, s/he must personally "re-activate" the *ex-voto* by tying a *fita*, or a lock of their hair, or by writing her/his name on it. The ultimate "de-activation" of the *ex-*

votos occurs when they are burned at the end of the pilgrimage season. Most of the art created for healing purposes is meant to be ephemeral. It is meant to be destroyed as part of the ritual. Unfortunately, in the case of many of the aforementioned examples of healing art, due to their commodification for a very lucrative art market, these artifacts are not being destroyed (Steiner 1994). This not only interrupts a healing strategy, but it also creates a chain reaction that impacts many facets of that culture and can ultimately erode the foundations of the entire society. I was concerned that this might be an issue I would confront in Canindé. While there was some indication of the commodification of the *ex-votos* being perceived as a problem within clerical circles, it appears to be one that is being addressed and curtailed.

Because of the influence of African cosmology and handicrafts in Brazil and the precedent of Native American carving, it has been assumed that the three-dimensional quality of *ex-votos* in Northeast Brazil grows out of these traditions. In a translation of Saia's introduction, an *ex-voto* is described as " . . . sculpture, magical in its workings, hybrid as a phenomenon of art and in technical tradition Afro-Negro by origin" (1944: 24). Saia bases this theory on what he considers African stylistic techniques of "cubism" depicted by the carvings. In this collection, it would seem that Saia may have manipulated his data to fit his theory in that he only displays wooden *ex-votos* and only chose, with the exception of two or three full figures, heads. Looking through the pictures, I saw *ex-votos* that were much simplified, but could be deemed vaguely reminiscent of the sort of wooden African sculptures that influenced the Cubist movement in Paris during the early part of this century. However, when using wood as a medium in sculpture, there are tendencies, especially for a person who is using rudimentary tools, to depict facial characteristics broadly. Triangles, such as used by Cubist painters and sculptors to depict facial characteristics, are much easier to cut than circles. I saw in Canindé and in Saia's book, *ex-votos* where the carver employed such a technique, but to make a sweeping

generalization that this is representative of the entire genre, I feel, is wrong. In the first place, Saia ignored other media and other subjects by limiting his study to only wooden heads. Secondly, this work was written in 1944, during the time when Brazilian intellectuals were supporting the positivist platform of racial prejudice called "whitening." To connect this "primitive" form of popular art with the Afro-Brazilian population followed the practice of the time to simultaneously praise the "exotic" yet reinforce its triviality and lack of relevance. The philosophy of the Brazilian government in the past has been to highlight its "Africanity" and even exploit it, but to keep its influence regulated only to what might be considered folkloric (Dzidzienyo 1985).

Unfortunately, there is still a residual prejudice in Brazil against this type of popular art. This prejudice, combined with the more important fact of the clergy keeping the *ex-votos* off the art market, making them commercially nonviable, has resulted in there being little else published about them. Because of this, fifty years later, Bercht (1990) and Frota (1990) quote Saia's work, possibly because there is no other. Bercht adds that " . . . interaction of visual vocabularies that have their origin in techniques and traditions developed by the non-Iberian components of Northeastern Brazilian culture: indigenous Brazilians, especially the Cairiri tribe, and West Africans, originally brought to Brazil as slaves," might serve as models for the *ex-votos*. In this fashion she continues by saying " [i]t should be noted that the techniques of carving wood and the modeling of objects from clay were known to all these ethnic groups well before their intermingling in Brazil" (1990: 16). In Canindé and many other areas of northeast Brazil, the Native Americans were exterminated before they could fully imprint the cultural maps that exist today and this region's inhospitable climate prohibited large-scale agriculture, making the African presence minimal. However, I do agree with Bercht regarding the importance Native American and African cultural influences. I think that through cultural diffusion, these influences can be perceived in northeast Brazil's votive tradition. I do, however, fault Saia

for ignoring the possibility of any European influence in the Brazilian *ex-voto* tradition. Again, this omission supports the intellectual environment of racial prejudice prevalent when he was writing. Saia's theory does not explain the variations of this tradition found in different parts of Brazil. For example, in Salvador, in the state of Bahia, a city in which Afro-Brazilians comprise the major portion of the city's population, the *ex-votos* that I saw were three dimensional, but they were not fashioned from wood or clay, but instead were of molded wax and were commercially made and mass-produced. In Canindé, where the population is a predominately European with a mixture of both Afro-Brazilian and Native American, the *ex-votos* are hand-crafted three-dimensionally from wood and clay, among other materials. While there is more wood available in rural areas such as Canindé than in an urban setting such as Bahia, wood is not plentiful in the *sertão*. Why the *ex-voto* tradition has resulted in three-dimensional unique pieces crafted from wood and clay in northeast Brazil, when reportedly the rest of Latin America has resorted to using wax or miniature metal representations, I cannot say, but I believe that the answer is far more complex than to simply say it is because of the African and Native American heritage found in Brazil. Another point that supports the addition of European influence to the mixture of African and Native American is in regards to transference. Bercht sites Saia as suggesting that "popular Brazilian concepts of disease and misfortune, seen as symptoms of spirit-like entities penetrating the human body have their roots in Indian and West African beliefs." She continues that Saia, "noted the existence among these groups of healing procedures that involve the transference of the 'bad spirit' into an inanimate object," suggesting that *ex-votos* serve that purpose in northeast Brazil (Bercht 1990: 13). I agree that the belief in transference, found in tenets of both West African and Cairiri religions, originally could have been a precedent for the *ex-votos*. However, the belief in transference was also strong in Europe and could easily have been transported to the New World. In any case, I believe that, in Canindé, the practice of transferring illness or any

other problem to an *ex-voto*, with the possible exception of a candle, has ceased. No one I interviewed made any reference to transferring their infirmity to their *milagre* as a mode of healing.

When I asked one of the local *freis* why the *ex-votos* in Canindé were carved from wood, his response was:

> "I don't know how to explain that. The people from the interior, at least before this modern time with television and all started destroying all of it, they would always make their own toys out of wood. It used to be very common among the people to make their own things."

As mentioned previously, there is evidence from the archaeological record that *ex-votos* were fashioned three-dimensionally in clay and wood for hundreds of years in Europe (Deyts 1998, Jackson 1998, Merrifield 1987). It is unclear if all of these votive offerings were offered in gratitude for the amelioration of a problem or if these same types of votives were also offered in supplication. One author suggests the interesting possibility that mimetic offerings were left at a shrine as a type of insurance for a continued curative effect. In this line of thinking, the pilgrim brought a likeness of the problem and left it with the deity in order that they not be forgotten (Davidson 1998).

It is still possible to witness this tradition of three-dimensional wooden or wax votive offerings in certain parts of Europe; however, now it is more common to see two-dimensional metal *ex-votos* or *támata* as they are called in Greece (Egan 1991, Dubisch 1995, Nolan 1991, Oettinger 1997). As to why three-dimensional forms survived in certain parts of the world and not others, again, I cannot say. It is a fascinating question and one that I hope to explore further by tracing the evolution of the European *ex-voto* from the archaeological findings of early Greece and Rome up to its present incarnations, especially those in Spain and Portugal.

Another component of this research that I hope to continue exploring is the political struggle in Canindé between the city government and the Catholic Church. The political climate in Canindé is changing from being molded by the will of the Church to one in which the dynamics are influenced by several different factions. Presently, the Church enforces legislation that maintains Canindé as a rather sleepy, conservative town. Presently, the shrine is the only reason to travel to Canindé, and because the Franciscans want to keep St. Francis as something that belongs to the poor, few efforts are being made to create lodgings or eating establishments to cater to any other type of clientele. For this reason, the city government is trying to wrest control of the city away from the Catholic diocese in order to capitalize on the undiscovered higher-end tourist potential. The merchants and other businessmen are not making much money from the poor who travel to Canindé. There is fledgling evidence of the beginnings of what could become a lucrative business in religious tourism. Each year there is more and more press coverage of the Festival honoring St. Francis. The year that I was in Canindé there was a documentary crew filming the entire event for Brazilian television. Already larger, more modern restaurants are being built on the land not owned by the church on the outskirts of town. These restaurants are being built with the encouragement of city officials who hope to entice bus tours to come to Canindé. Presently, there are no overnight facilities in Canindé which could accommodate such tours, but I feel sure that they will begin to appear in time. I hope to be able to visit every few years to document these or any other changes that mark this tradition. It will be interesting to see this struggle from both the religious and secular perspectives. At present, the bishops in Fortaleza leave the daily diocesan activities of Canindé to the discretion of the head of the monastery. The current head is sympathetic to the plight of the poor and is fairly savvy in political dealings but is, I believe, being groomed for a bishopric in Fortaleza. If another head were brought into Canindé from elsewhere, or if the religious leaders in Fortaleza decided to support the

plans to increase tourism, moves that would undoubtedly increase their revenues in Canindé, the whole atmosphere in Canindé would change. I do not know what the target population or the underlying vision are for increasing the tourist participation at the shrine. It may be that the city officials hope to increase the following of St. Francis of Wounds and turn Canindé into an international religious pilgrimage site similar to Lourdes. Should this goal be realized, it will only occur with the blessing of the Catholic Church. The battle that will ensue in the coming years may not only be between the Church and the city government. If the ecumenical leaders decide that the commodification of the shrine would be beneficial, not to mention very profitable, then I fear there will be factionalism within the Church as well. Whatever the future brings, it will undoubtedly impact the pilgrimage tradition. If the city officials in Canindé have their way, the poor will be once again disenfranchised, this time spiritually so, and left to their own devices until they can construct another guardian. I am afraid that should something like this happen, the work of some of the more liberal *freis* would be undone. Hopefully this will not come to pass, but as Jetulio the gravedigger said, the winds of change are blowing.

No matter what occurs in the future, I believe that the *ex-voto* tradition is ingrained in the lives of the followers of St. Francis and could possibly continue to be practiced even if they were forced to practice this tradition elsewhere or substitute another saint in his place. Through this research, I have demonstrated how this tradition has become emblematic as a encoded way of reacting against the domination of the upper class. These pieces of art reflect the cycle of poverty in which the oppressed must live, and can be read as a "metasocial commentary" of their poverty-related diseases and afflictions. However, these same *ex-votos* and the stories and legends that spring from them can also act as revitalization agents that reinforce their belief system and encourage an atmosphere of solidarity. Both of these functions are vital to the continuation of the "nation of St. Francis," which in turn I believe is vital to the survival of the impoverished people of

Northeast Brazil. The people of Northeast Brazil have constructed St. Francis as the physician, psychiatrist, friend, and *patrão* who will never desert them. He is their helpmate in the present and guardian of their future. I believe that their being able to lean on him is many times all that is carrying them through the day. I also believe that the *freis* in Canindé realize this, and for this reason are resisting changes from outside the Church or from within that might jeopardize the vitality and continuation of the "nation of St. Francis."

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Pilgrimage to Canindé

IDENTIFICATION OF THE INTERVIEWEE

1. Sex: ___ Masc. ___ Fem.
2. Age: ___ 20-30 ___ 30-40 ____ 40-50 ____50 or more
3. Occupation: _____
4. Residence: City: _____ State: _____
5. Trips to Canindé: ___1 ___2 ____3 ____4 ____ more than four
6. Type of travel: _____on foot ____ by animal _____ by car _____ by bus
   _____ by pau de arara ____ other

PERCEPTION OF ILLNESS

7. What is the name of the illness that you have? _____
8. How long have you had this illness (in months)? ___1-3 ___4-6 ___6-12
   ____ 12 or more
9. Type of affliction: ___ cut ____ tumor ____dermal _____other
   Details:_____

DECRIPTION OF THE *EX-VOTO*

10. *Ex-voto* of: ____ wood ____clay ____ plaster ____cloth _____ other
    ____ head ____ feet/legs _____ arms/hands _____body
    ____ breast ____ internal organ _____ other
11. Payment made (in addition to) *ex-voto*
    _____ wore *batina* _____ walked on knees _____ lit candles _____ cut hair
    _____ went to confession/Mass _____ other
12. Who made the *ex-voto*? _____
13. Did you pay to have it made? _____ How much? _____
14. Does your *ex-voto* correctly illustrate your problem? _____ How? _____
    _____
15. Why did you make a *promessa* with St. Francis? _____

WHAT OTHER EXAMINATION DID YOU HAVE?

16. _____ *rezadeira* _____ *pai de santo* _____ *curandeiro* _____Spiritist healer
    _____ doctor _____ pharmacist _____ séance _____ other
17. What (or who) resolved your problem? _____

Questionário _____

Romaria de Canindé

IDENTIFICAÇÃO DO ENTREVISTADO

1. Sexo: ☐ Masc. ☐ Fem.
2. Idade: ☐ 20-30 ☐ 30-40 ☐ 40-50 ☐50 ou mais
3. Trabalho: _____
4. Procedência: Cidade: _____ Estado: _____
5. Vindas a Canindé: ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ mais de quatro
6. Tipo de viagem: ☐ a pé ☐ animal ☐ carro ☐ ônibus ☐ pau de arara
   ☐ outro _____

PERCEPÇÃO DA DOENÇA

1. Qual o nome da doença que teve? _____
2. Tempo em que esteve doente (em meses) ☐ 1-3 ☐ 4-6 ☐ 6-12 ☐ 12 ou mais
3. Tipo de afecção: ☐ corte ☐ tumor ☐ pele ☐ outro
   Detalhes: _____
   _____

DESCRIÇÃO DO EX-VOTO

1. Ex-voto de: ☐ madeira ☐ terra ☐ cera ☐ gesso ☐ pano ☐ outro
   ☐ cabeça ☐ memb. inferiores ☐ memb. superiores ☐ corpo ☐ seios ☐ órgão interno
   ☐ outro _____
2. PAGAMENTOS FORA O EX-VOTO
   ☐ usar batina ☐ andar de joelhos ☐ acender velas ☐ cortar cabelo ☐ confissão - missa
   ☐ trazer foto ☐ outro _____
3. Quem fez o ex-voto? _____
4. Você pagou para fazer? _____ Preço: _____
5. O seu ex-voto ilustra corretamente o seu problema?_____. Como? _____
   _____
6. Por que você faz uma promessa a São Francisco? _____
   _____

O QUE ALGUM DESTES DISSE QUE VOCÊ TINHA?

1. ☐ rezadeira ☐ pai de santo ☐ curandeiro ☐ espirita ☐ médico ☐ farmacêutico
   ☐ sessão ☐ outro _____
2. O que resolveu o seu problema? _____

PILGRIMAGE OF CANINDÉ
Compilations from questionnaires

IDENTIFICATION OF THE PILGRIM

1. GENDER:
   Masculine = 88 Feminine = 212

2. AGE GROUP:
   Under 20 = 27 20-30 = 48 30-40 = 60 40-50 = 54 Over 50 = 111

3. OCCUPATION:
   Unemployed = 62 Student = 10 Domestic = 77 Agriculture = 50 Retired = 26
   Other = 75

4. RESIDENCE:
   Ceará = 107 Piauí = 81 Maranhão = 105 Pernambuco = 3 Other = 4

5. NUMBER OF PILGRIMAGES:
   First = 59 Second = 36 Third = 35 Fourth = 28 More than Four = 142

6. MODE OF TRANSPORTATION:
   Pau-de-arara = 116 Bus = 154 Car = 22 Walking = 8

7. MATERIAL USED FOR THE *EX-VOTO*:
   Wood = 259 Plaster = 17 Cloth = 11 Clay = 7 Wax = 6

8. PART OF BODY ILLUSTRATED BY *EX-VOTO*:
   Arms/Hands = 53 Legs/Feet = 115 Head = 78 Breast = 21 Whole Body = 17
   Internal Organ = 11 Other = 5

9. MAKER OF THE *EX-VOTO*:
   Pilgrim = 46 Carpenter = 84 Friend = 108 Relative = 62

10. PAID FOR THE *EX-VOTO*:
    Yes = 132 No = 168

11. RECEIVED ASSISTANCE IN ADDITION TO *PROMESSA*:
    None = 62 Medical = 208 Curandeiro = 2 Rezadeira = 2
    Farmacéutico = 4 Pai de Santo = 2 Espirita = 2
    Rezadeira/Medical = 17 Rezadeira/Pai de Santo = 1

12. INFIRMITY:
    Cut = 33 Tumor = 32 Rash = 50 Headache = 39 Broken Bone = 22
    Temporary Paralysis = 24 Internal Organ = 25 Nervous Disorder = 10

Other = 65

13. *EX-VOTO* ILLUSTRATES AFFLICTION:
    Yes = 122 No = 172* Did not answer = 6
    [* this includes *ex-votos* showing no trauma, because the pilgrim intended to illustrate that healing had occurred]

14. PAYMENT IN ADDITION TO *EX-VOTO*:
    Wore brown robe = 12 Went to confession = 112 Walked on knees = 2
    Cut hair = 4 Nothing additional = 79 Robe & confession = 42
    Candles & confession = 12 Monetary offering = 6 Combination of 2 or more =31*
    [*represents combinations other than those mentioned above]

APPENDIX B

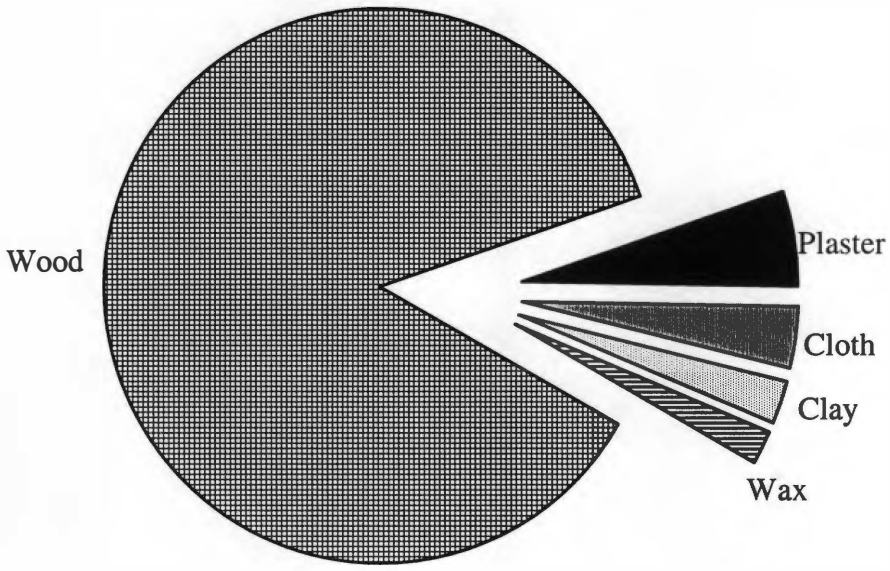

Figure 1: Question10 from the questionnaire: material the pilgrim used for the *ex-voto*.

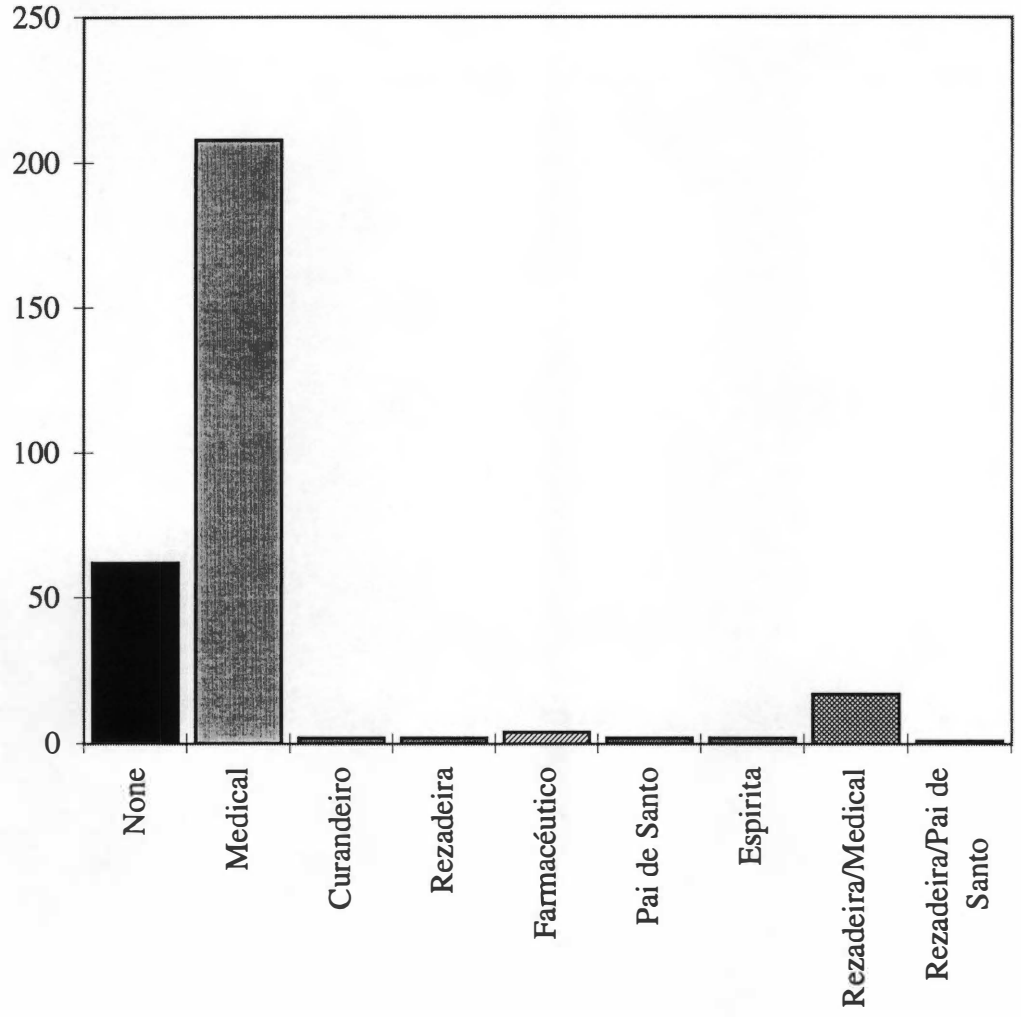

Figure 2: Question 16 from the questionnaire: assistance that the pilgrim received in addition to the *promessa*.

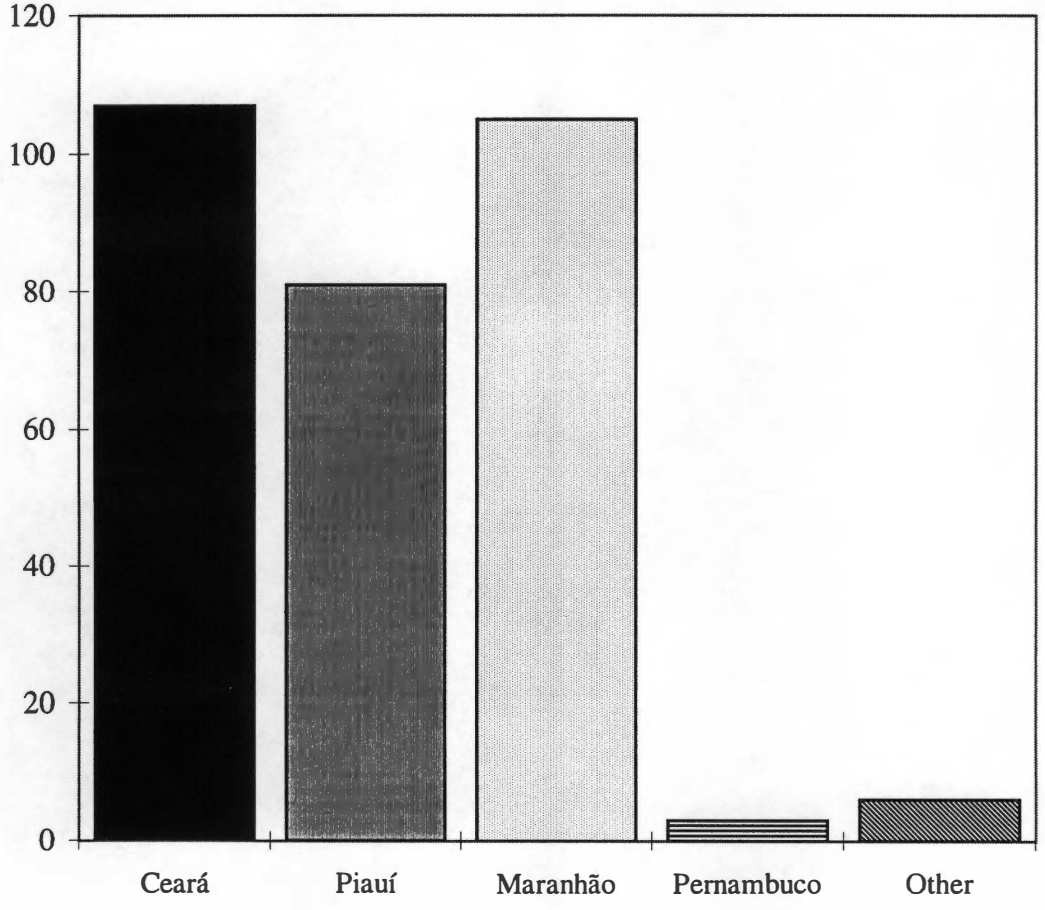

Figure 3: Question 4 from the questionnaire: state where the pilgrim resides.

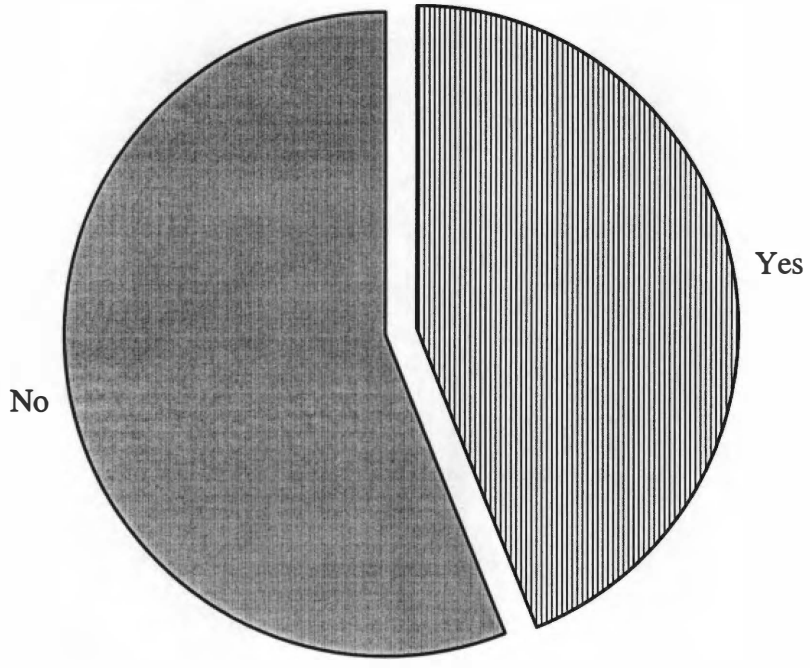

Figure 4: Question 14 from the questionnaire: does the *ex-voto* accurately illustrate the affliction?

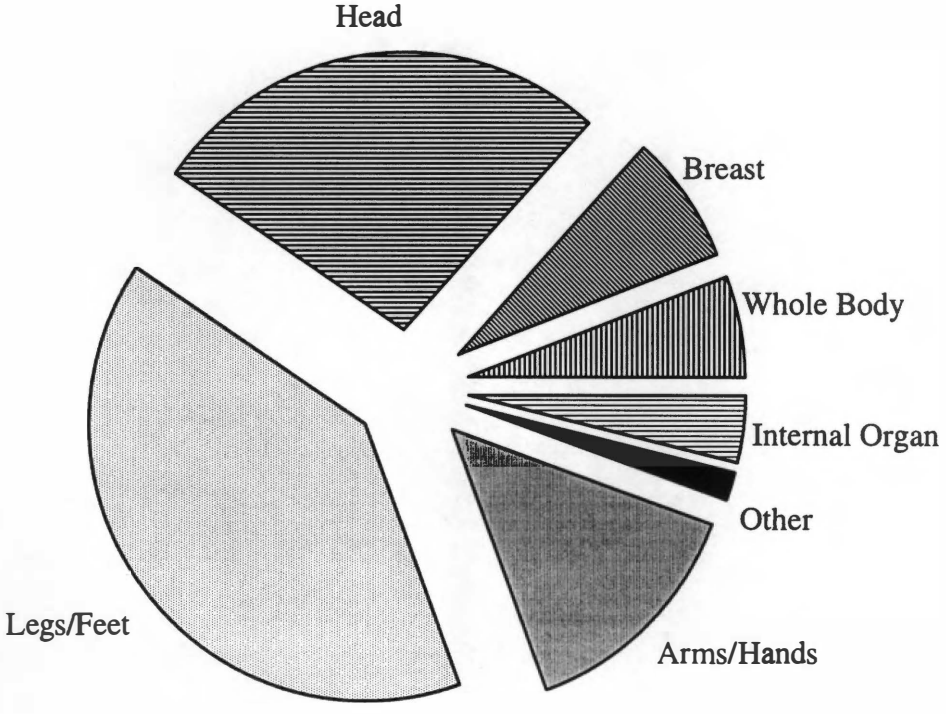

Figure 5: Question 10 from the questionnaire: part of the body illustrated by the *ex-voto*.

Figure 6: Map of Northeast Brazil
Source: Americas Society. 1989. *House of Miracles: Votive Sculpture from Northeastern Brazil*. New York: New York.

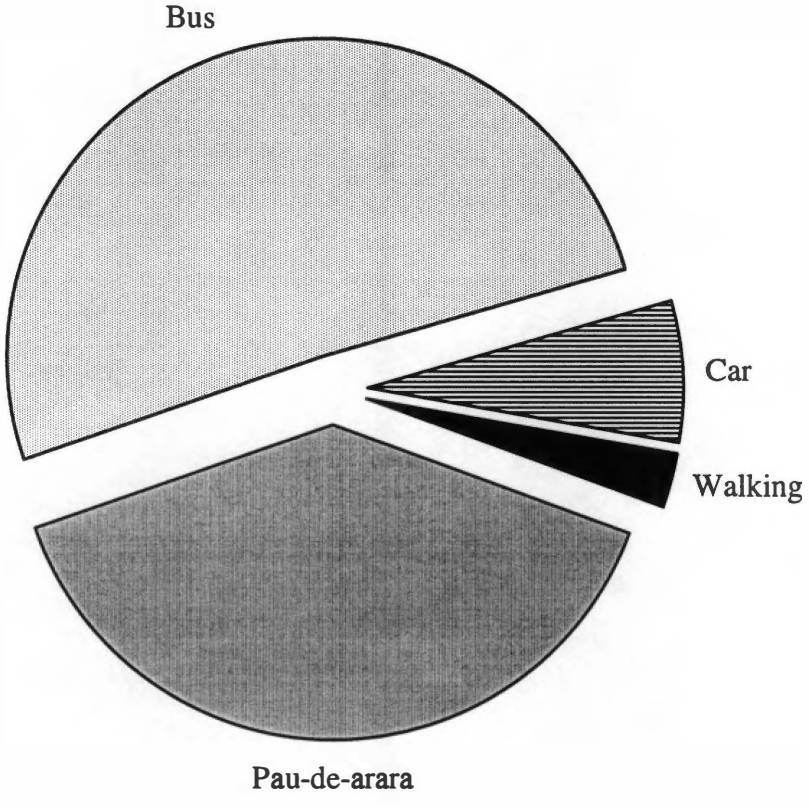

Figure 7: Question 6 from questionnaire: mode of pilgrim's transportation to Canindé

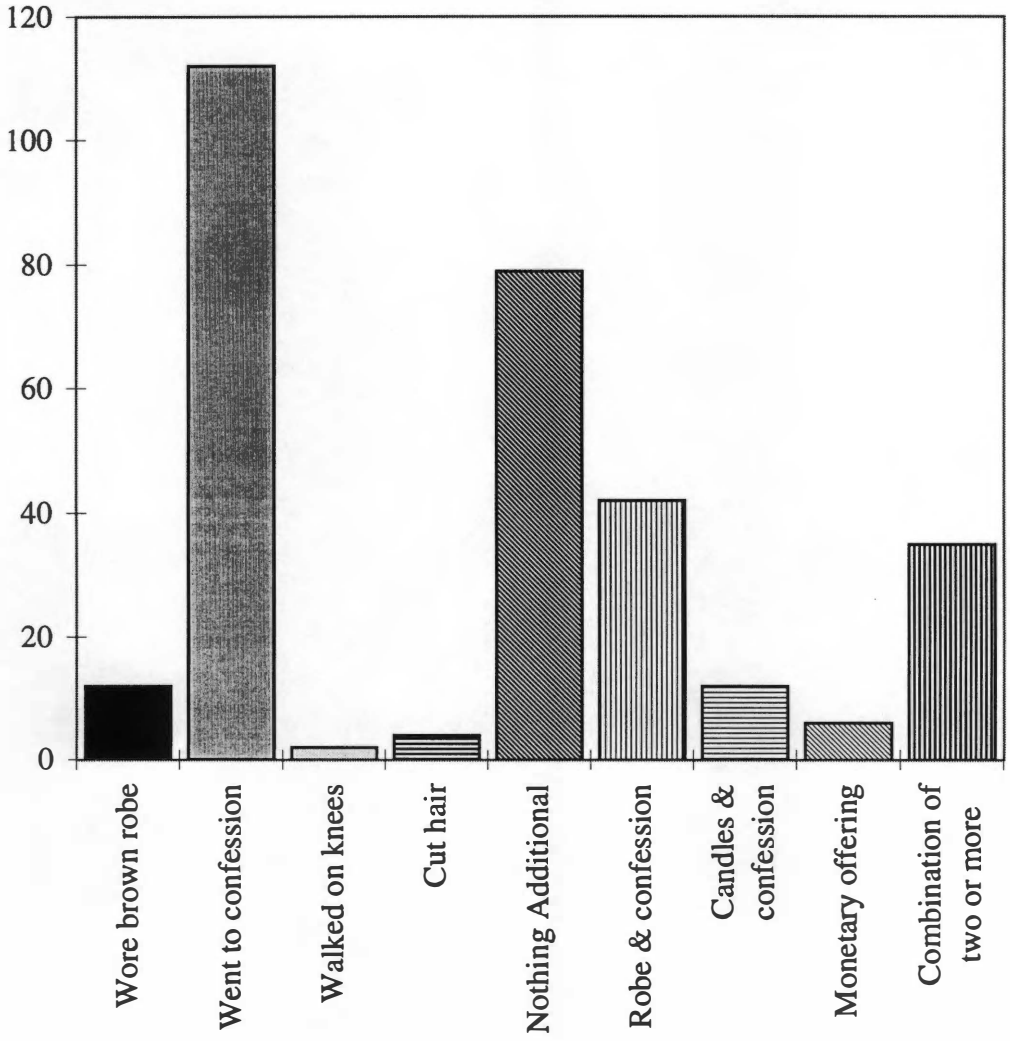

Figure 8: Question 11 from questionnaire: other ways that pilgrims fulfilled their *promessas* besides an *ex-voto*.

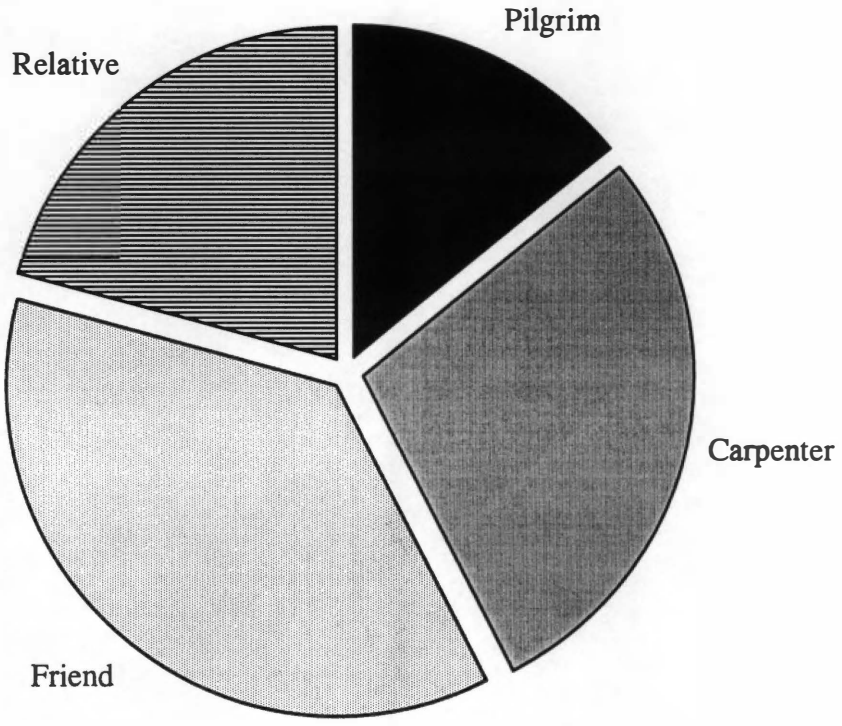

Figure 9: Question 12 from the questionnaire: maker of the *ex-voto*

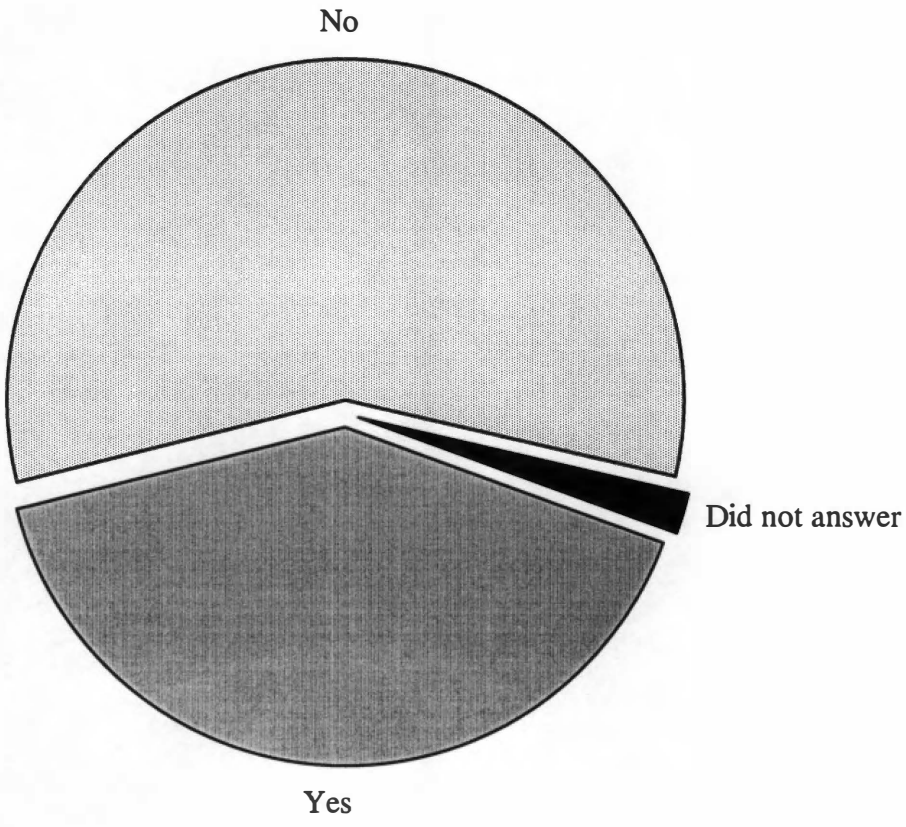

Figure 10: Question 13 from the questionnaire: did you pay for the *ex-voto*?

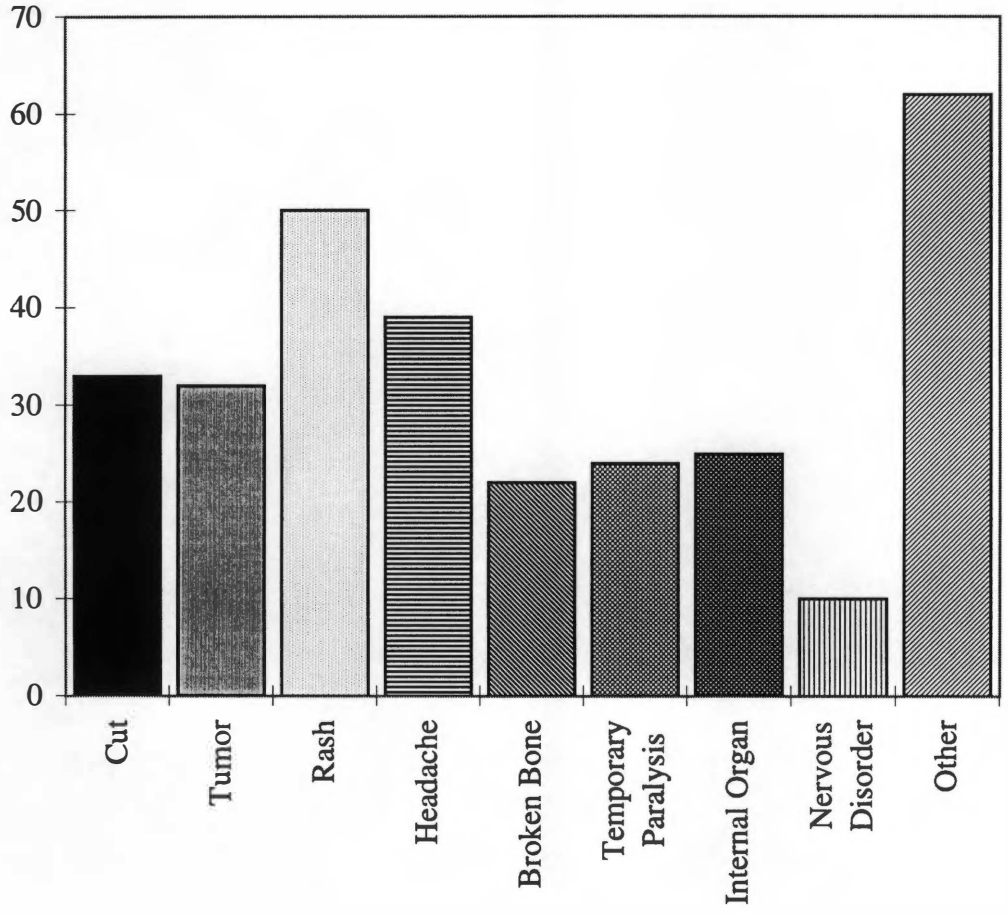

Figure 11: Question 9 from the questionnaire: what was the type of affliction?

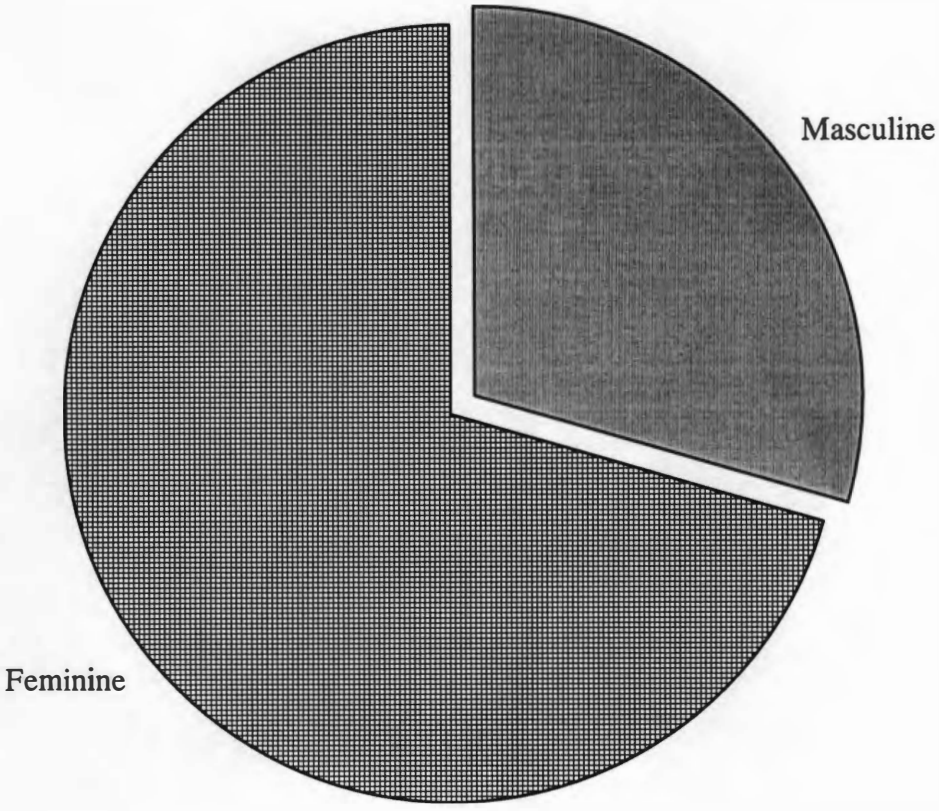

Figure 12: Question 1 from the questionnaire: demographics of female to male pilgrims.

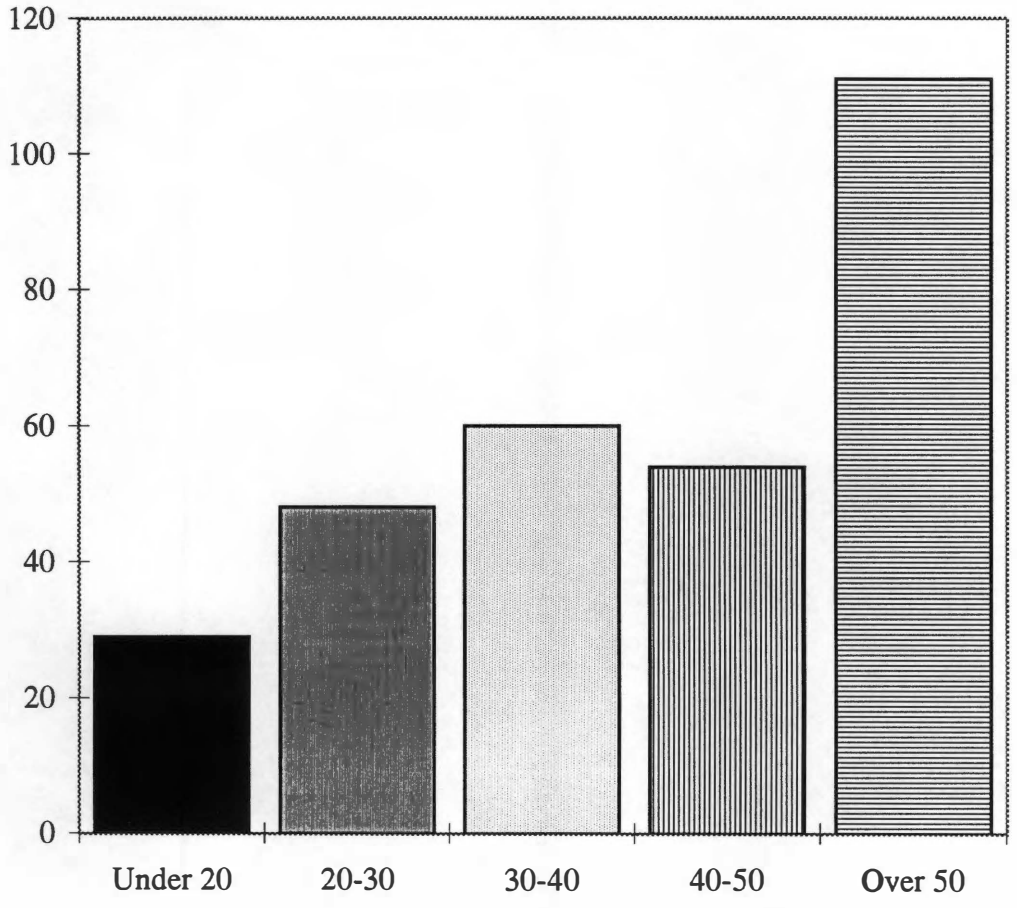

Figure 13: Question 2 from the questionnaire: breakdown of pilgrims by age.

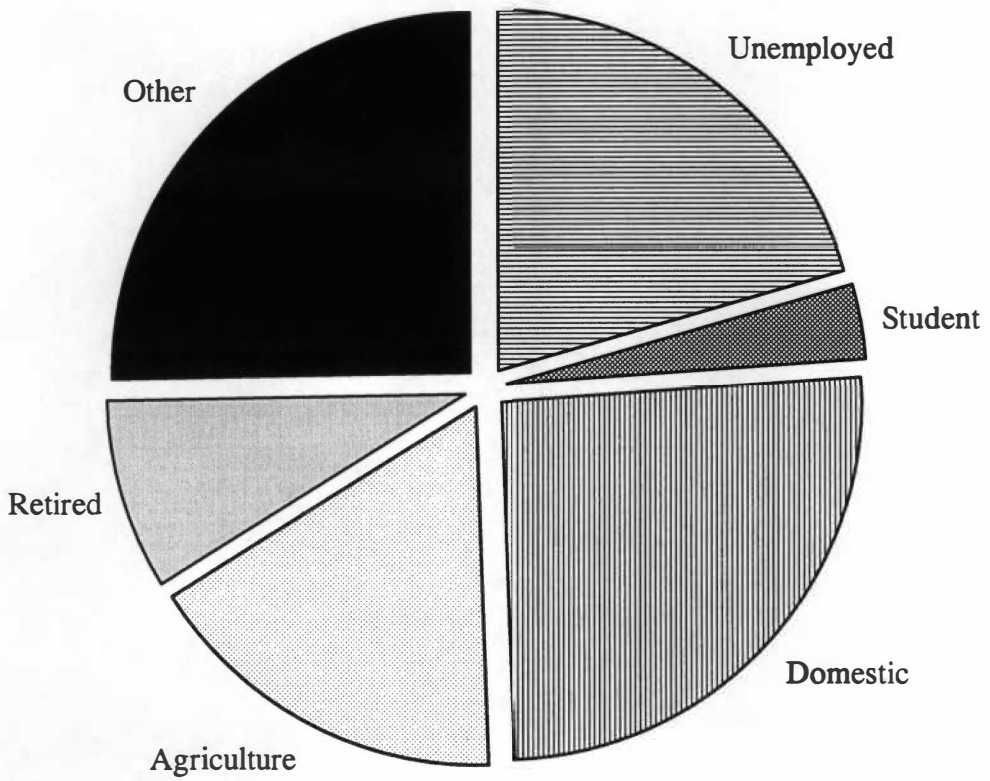

Figure 14: Question 3 from the questionnaire: breakdown of pilgrims by occupation.

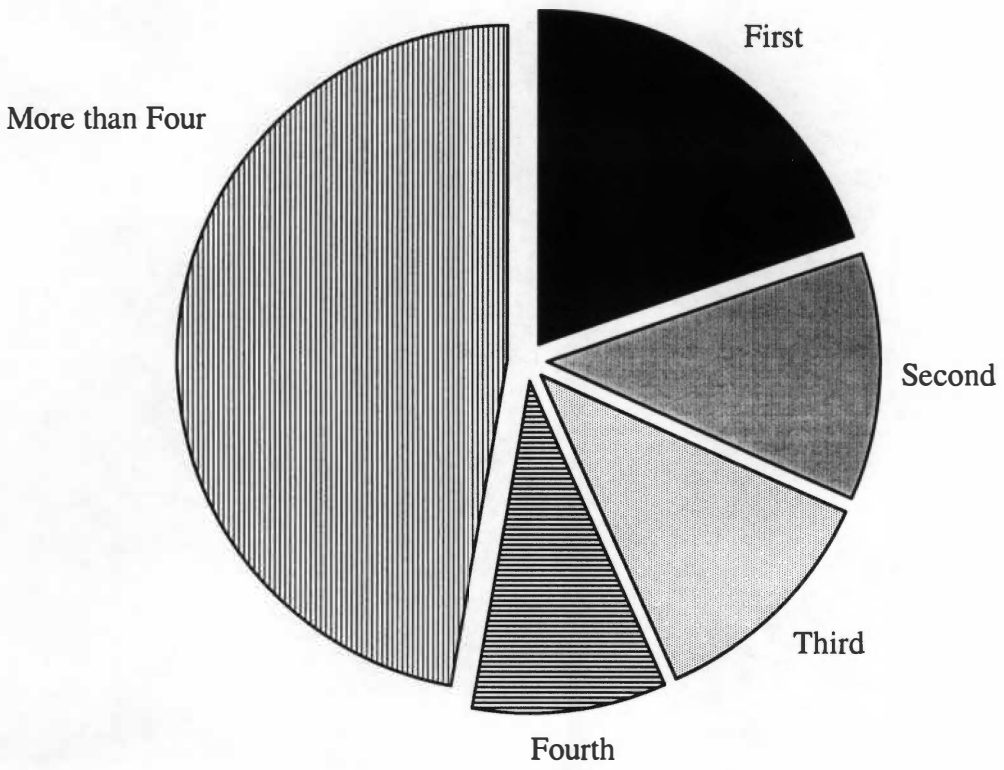

Figure 15: Question 5 from the questionnaire: number of previous trips the pilgrim has made to Canindé

VITA

Lindsey King, a descendent of early settlers to the Appalachian region, was born in Bristol, Tennessee. She is a product of the Tennessee State Education System, with the exception of taking her Master's degree at Georgia State University in Atlanta. Academically, she has pursued her interest in how and what people create and how that is a reflection of their culture by obtaining first a degree in art history, then a Master's in folk studies, and finally a Ph.D. in cultural anthropology. Between these degrees she furthered her education through travel: hitch-hiking across the United States, back-packing through out Europe, and living in Rome, Italy and London, England. She has engaged in some interesting occupations such as being a night-shift switchboard operator for a merchant marine school in Maryland, a laborer on an all-female construction crew in California, and a production weaver for a designer in New York City. In addition to these areas of employment, she has also worked for several museums; notably the Atlanta History Center, where she did background research for exhibitions and was the manager of the Tullie Smith House, an early southern farm complex. In the Fall of 1993 she entered the doctoral program in cultural anthropology at the University of Tennessee. She continued working in museums at the Frank H. McClung Museum at the University of Tennessee, where she assisted in collections management and exhibit preparation. Most recently she has been part of a research team conducting an oral history project sponsored jointly by The National Park Service and the University of Tennessee Department of Anthropology. Her degree was received August, 1999.